

This manuscript was commissioned by Dr. Pamela Ruiter -Feenstra, world renown Carillonist and an author, composer, organist and educator. *Lavender Rainbow* tells a short story of triumph, devastation, and the rebirth of the life of Florence Price, the first noted African American female composer to gain national recognition.

Born in Little Rock, Arkansas on April 9, 1887, Price won first prize in the Wanamaker Competition with her *Symphony in E Minor*, becoming the first woman composer of African descent to have a work performed by a major symphony orchestra. At home, Florence's parents initially were flourishing economically. Her father was a dentist who had white clients and her mother was a music teacher.

At age 14, Florence graduated as high school valedictorian. She was accepted into the New England Conservatory, where her mother insisted Florence hide her heritage and disguise herself as Latina to help her have a more safe and secure life.

Compositionally, Dvorak was a huge influence on her, and he encouraged bringing in all heritage into her composing. She began to utilize the spiritual in her writings as well as characteristics from the Cakewalk, a dance step danced by slaves on the plantation grounds, and other features from the African American musical traditions.

Upon her return home, things at home began to change. When Jim Crow laws began to permeate black life in a very difficult and devastating manner economically, culturally, and financially. Her family wealth diminished. Her father died penniless as he lost the bulk of his dental practice. Most of his patients were white patients and he was unable to keep them during the Jim Crow laws. Her mother decided to return to her home state and left Florence in Arkansas, and it is assumed that she escaped into a life where she did not reveal her African heritage, as did her brother.

Florence briefly moved to Atlanta to teach, returning to Little Rock when she and her husband married. After the John Carter lynching in 1926, which left the body of John Carter tragically hanging in front of her husband's law office, they escaped to Chicago.

The couple had two daughters and eventually the parents would divorce. Florence continued her writing, teaching piano, playing organ for silent movies, and advocating for the performances of her works up to the day of her death. Upon her death, June 3, 1953, Florence's music continued to receive performances however a large portion of her music seemed to have disappeared for over 30 years. In 2006, this music would be found in her abandoned home in Kankakee, IL. The music was eventually transferred to the Special Collections at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, AK with Dr. Barbara Jackson becoming one of the first editors to edit this newly discovered music. Dr. Michael Cooper is the editor of many of her keyboard works with Schirmer who now owns the work of Florence Price.

Karen Walwyn

To read more on Florence Price please visit <https://florenceprice.com>.