

Florence Bea(trice) Price was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, on 9 April 1887. She began learning music from her mother at an early age and gave her first piano performance at age four, reportedly publishing a composition (now lost) at age eleven. She graduated high school at the age of sixteen and in that same year was accepted into the New England Conservatory (Boston), then as now one of the most prestigious musical academies in the U.S.

More than any other instrument or ensemble, the piano was the primary outlet for Price's inexhaustible musical imagination. It was the instrument on which she received her earliest musical education and it, together with the organ, was the focal point of her education at the New England Conservatory (Boston), where she completed two diplomas at the age of nineteen in 1906. It was the centerpiece of her music teaching at the Cotton Plant Academy (a large co-educational boarding school near Arkadelphia, Arkansas for Black Americans) from 1906 to 1910, and of her work as head of the Music Department of Atlanta University from 1910-1912. And she taught piano privately from 1912 until only months before her death in 1953 – not only to dozens of beginning, intermediate, and advanced students in Arkansas and her adopted hometown of Chicago, but also to her own daughters. Aside from the music she wrote for the instrument, one of the most telling (and charming) indications of the centrality of the piano to her identity as musician is an undated ink drawing found among the Florence Price papers in the Libraries of the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville – a competent drawing, apparently in a youthful hand, of a piano in a domestic room of some sort, lid up, bearing the caption: MY CAREER.

Small wonder, then, that compositions for piano make up some 216 of Price's total surviving output of 458 works – about 47%, more than any other single category, fol-