



# Florence Price

Composer of the Week

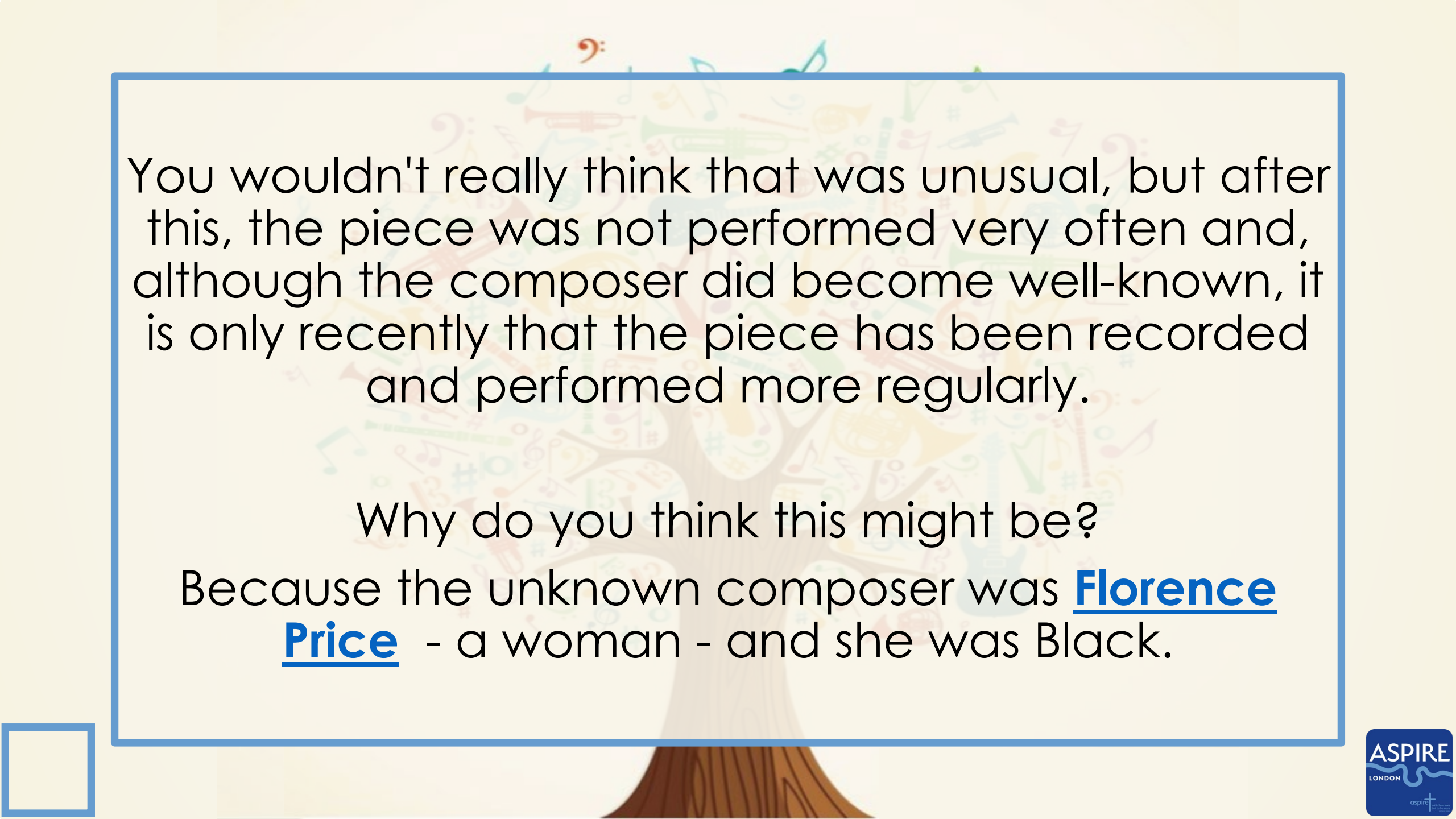


Florence Price  
(1887-1953)



On 15 June 1933 the Chicago Symphony Orchestra performed a brand new piece of music by an unknown composer. It was a **Symphony** which had won first prize in an important competition and the music critic of the *Chicago Daily News* declared it “**a faultless work, a work that speaks its own message with restraint and yet with passion... worthy of a place in the regular symphonic repertoire.**”

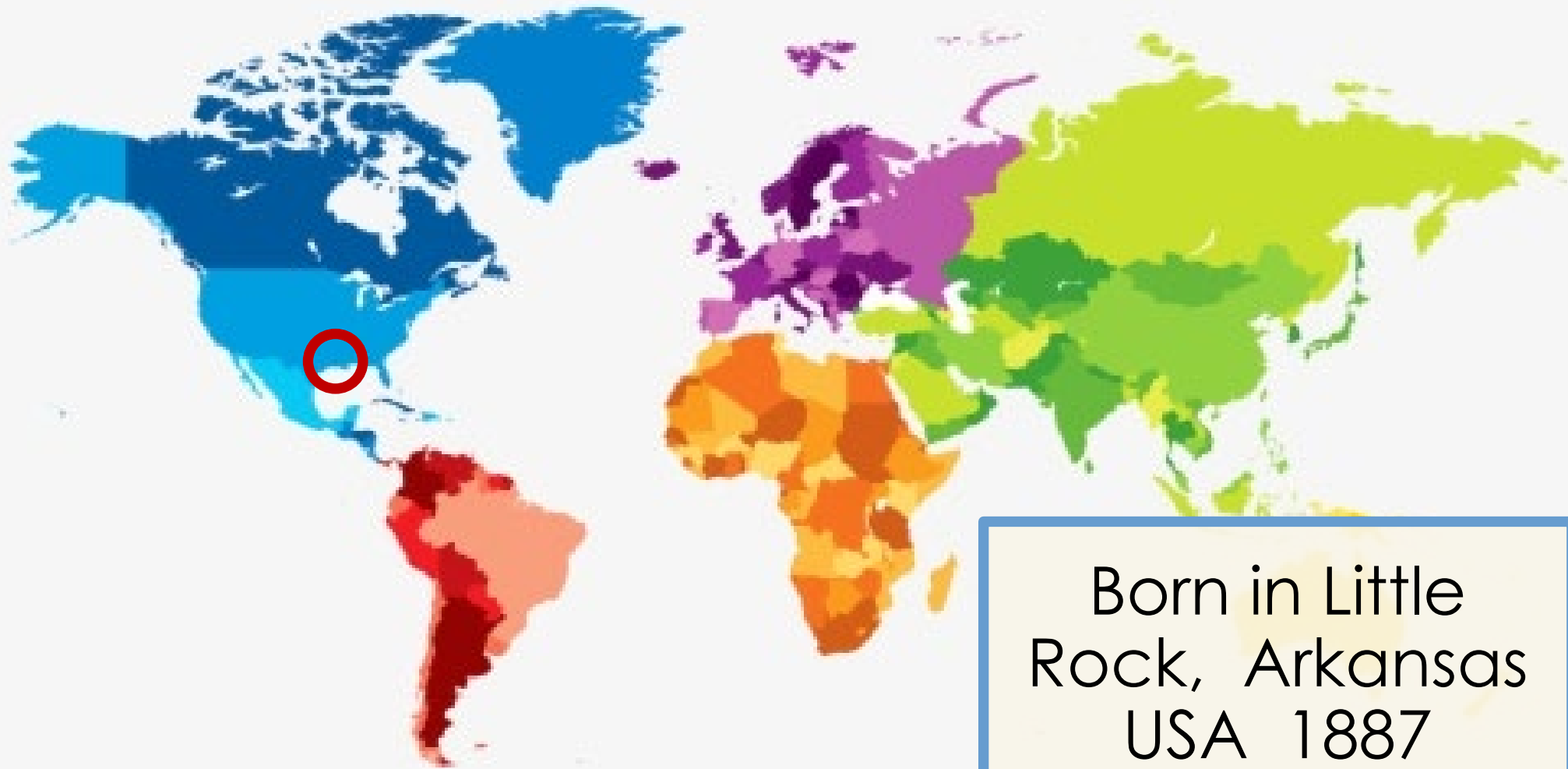


A background illustration of a tree with a brown trunk and green foliage. The tree is surrounded by various musical notes and instruments, including a trumpet, a saxophone, and a trombone, all in a light, faded color. The entire scene is set against a light yellow background.

You wouldn't really think that was unusual, but after this, the piece was not performed very often and, although the composer did become well-known, it is only recently that the piece has been recorded and performed more regularly.

Why do you think this might be?

Because the unknown composer was Florence Price - a woman - and she was Black.



Born in Little  
Rock, Arkansas  
USA 1887



Died in Chicago,  
Illinois, USA  
1953

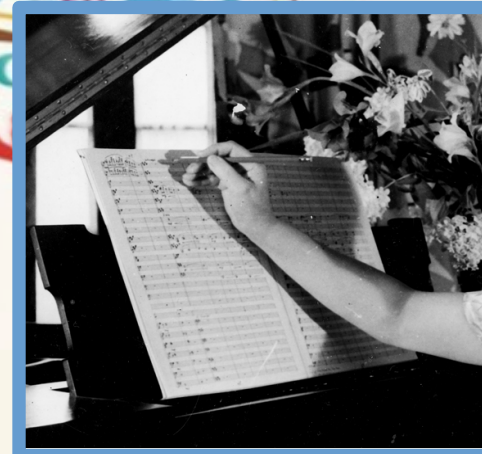
Born to a mixed race family. Her father was the only African-American dentist in the city and her mother was a piano teacher.

At that time, and in that part of America, there were great tensions between black and white people. Black people were not allowed to do many of the things white people were and they led difficult lives.



In spite of all this, Florence's family were well-respected in the area.

Florence was originally taught the piano by her mother. She gave her first piano performance at the age of 4 and had her first composition published at the age of 11.







She studied at the New England Conservatory of Music and by 1910 she was the head of the music department at Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia.

The background features a stylized tree with a brown trunk and branches. The branches are filled with various musical notes and instruments in different colors, including a trumpet, a saxophone, and a trombone. The overall theme is music and culture.

In 1912 Florence married Thomas Price, a lawyer, and they moved back to live in Arkansas. She could not find work in Arkansas however because of the colour of her skin.

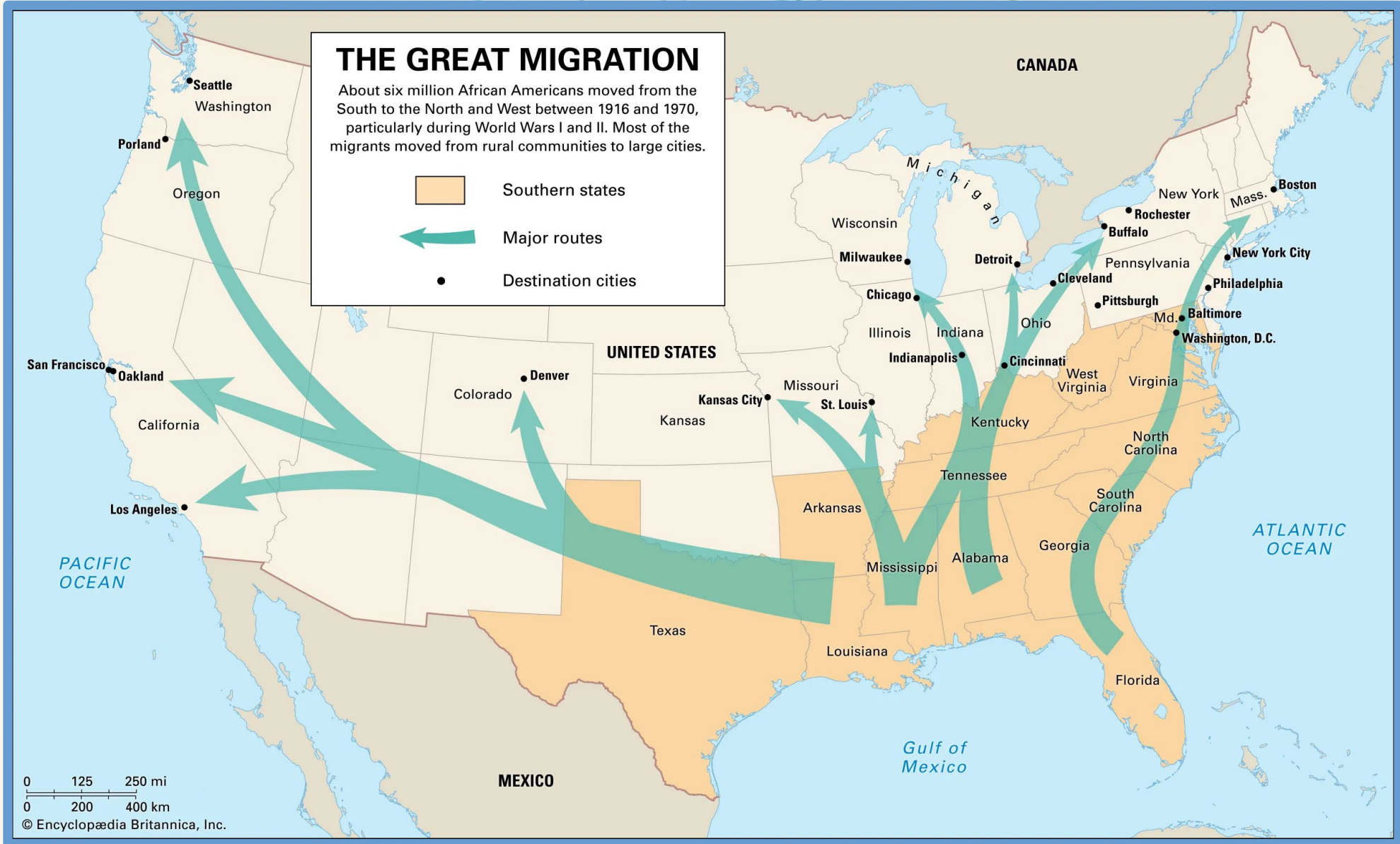
Things got so bad that, like many black families in the deep south of America, they moved further north to Chicago. This was called – the Great Migration.



# THE GREAT MIGRATION

About six million African Americans moved from the South to the North and West between 1916 and 1970, particularly during World Wars I and II. Most of the migrants moved from rural communities to large cities.

-  Southern states
-  Major routes
-  Destination cities

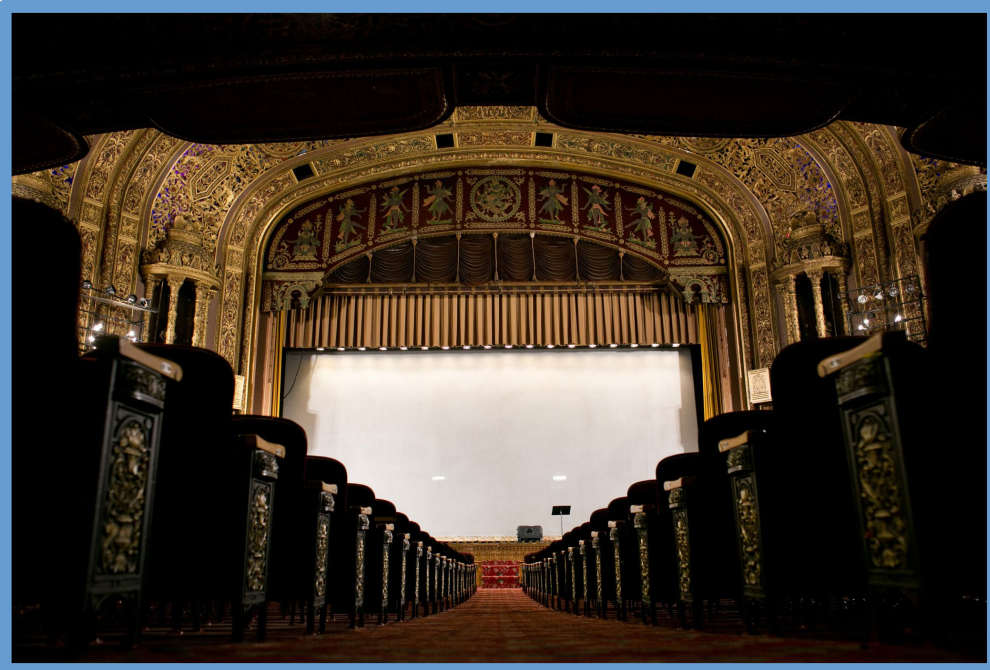








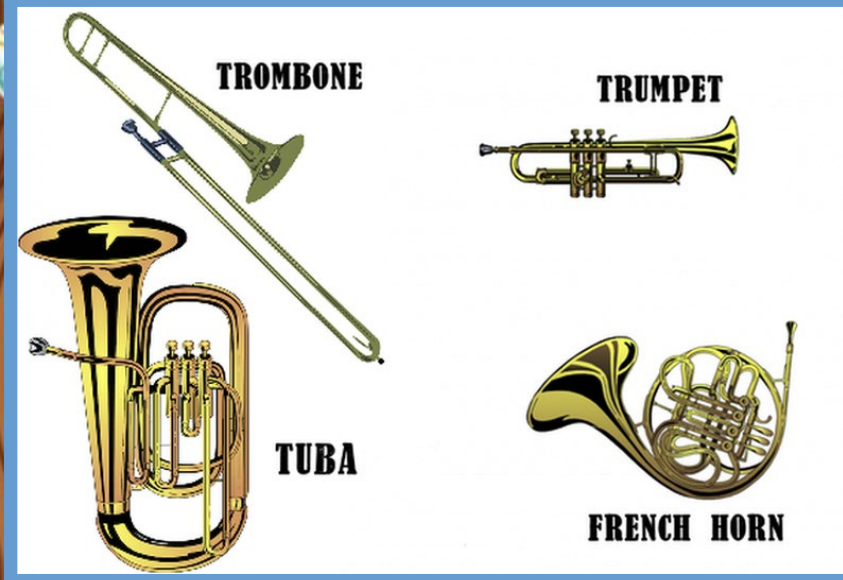
After her divorce in 1931, Florence needed to earn money to look after her two daughters. She began working as a cinema organist for silent films, she also composed songs for radio advertisements – **jingles**.



The performance of Florence's **1<sup>st</sup> Symphony** by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, already mentioned, made history as this was the first ever performance of a piece of music composed by a black female composer.

The second **movement** (part) is composed mainly for Brass instruments.

Can you name  
the brass  
instruments in an  
orchestra?





Florence's music is a mixture of Classical European traditions, especially Dvorak, and native American music.

Listen to this **String Quartet**, one section is based on a very famous **American Spiritual**.

A **Spiritual** is a traditional song, composed by slaves and often sung in the fields. They speak of a better place (heaven), where the slaves longed to be, away from the life they led on earth.

This song is called **Swing Low, Sweet Chariot** and for some reason you can often hear it being sung at England Rugby International matches by the fans.



Do you remember  
the instruments in a  
**String Quartet?**



violin



violin

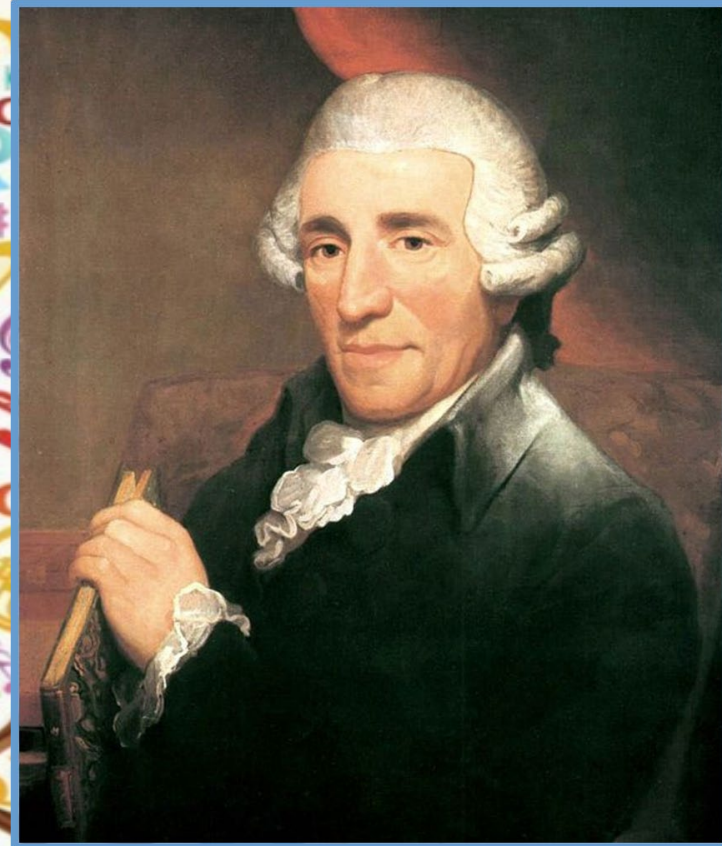


viola



cello

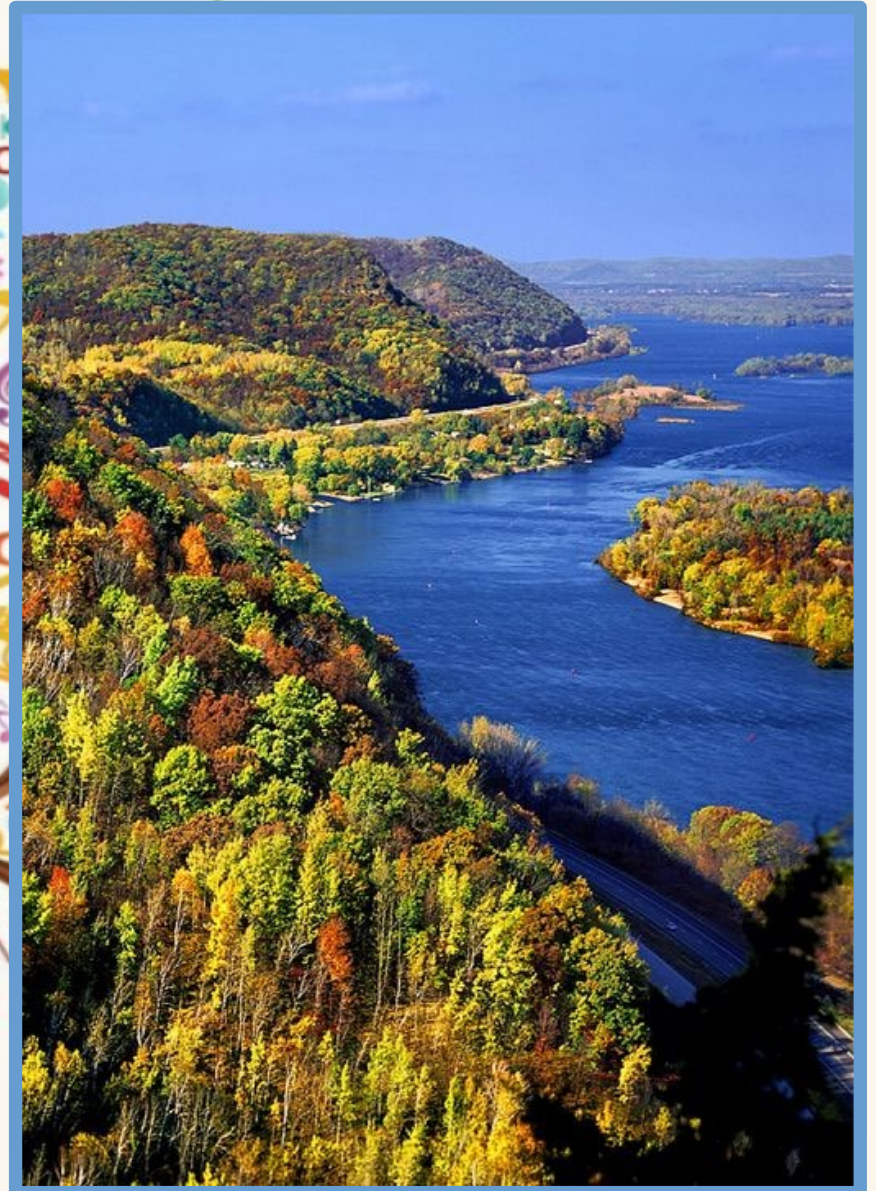
Can you remember the name of the composer we already know who wrote many **String Quartets**?



**Joseph Haydn**



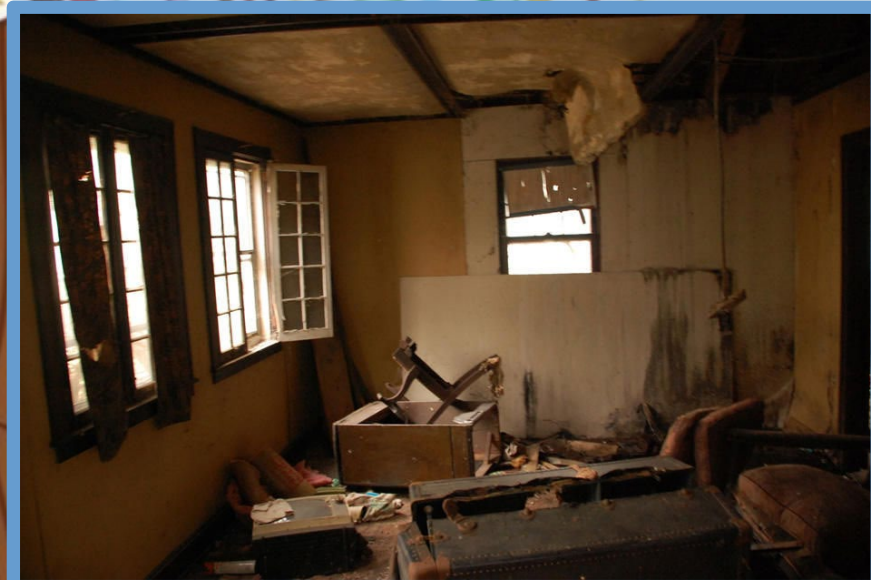
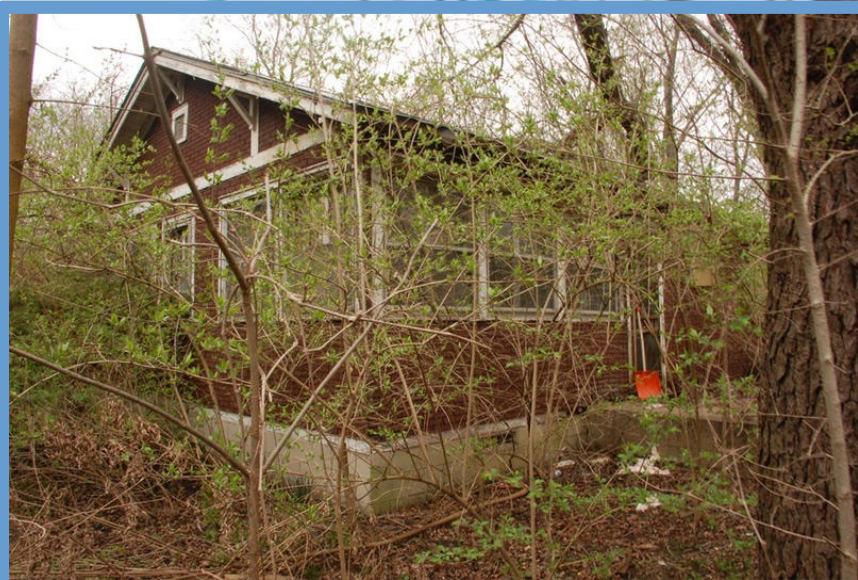
Florence Price's *Music* is very descriptive, here the **Mississippi River Suite** depicts just that – You can hear a boat travelling down the US's second largest river, with the sights and smells of its banks captured in the tunes along the way. It was composed in 1943.





Following her death, much of her work was forgotten, as new musical styles took over.

However, completely by accident, many manuscripts were found in 2009 (56 years after her death), in a dilapidated house in Illinois, which Florence had used as a Summer home. That's quite a miracle.





In 2019 the Florence Price Music Festival began and in January 2021 she was BBC Radio 3's Composer of the Week.

This song is also based on a **Spiritual**, it is called **At the Feet o' Jesus**.

