



William Grant Still (American Composers)

Catherine Parsons Smith

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In this compact introduction to the life and work of eminent African American composer William Grant Still (1895-1978), Catherine Parsons Smith tracks the composer's interrelated careers in popular and concert music. Still merged both musical traditions in his work, studying composition with George W. Chadwick at the New England Conservatory, collaborating with Langston Hughes on *Troubled Island*, and working as a commercial arranger and composer on Broadway and radio during the Harlem Renaissance. Still also played in the pit band for *Shuffle Along*, served as recording director for the first black-owned record label, Black Swan, and arranged music for artists such as Sophie Tucker, Paul Whiteman, and Artie Shaw. Best known for his *Afro-American Symphony* and other works that drew heavily on black American musical heritage, Still struggled against financial hardship and declining attention to his work, which he attributed to political and racist conspiracies. This "dean of Afro-American composers" created his own, unique version of musical modernism, influencing commercial music, symphonic music, and opera in the process.

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