



Virgil Thomson (1896-1989) was a great American Composer. He composed in almost every genre of music, including our Anthem for this Sunday, My Shepherd Will Supply My Need.

Thomson grew up rooted in the heartland of America and its protestant traditions living in Kansas City, Missouri from his birth. His earliest introduction to music was in the church. He started piano lessons at the age of 5 and would practice by listening to various theatrical shows and accompanying silent films.

After his time in the Army, he enrolled as a student at Harvard, where he worked as an assistant under Harvard's Glee Club Director, Archibald Davison and studied composition with Edward Burlingame Hill. These two men curated a strong curiosity for all things French, and helped Thomson in getting a fellowship to travel to Paris, where he studied organ and counterpoint with Nadia Boulanger. He graduated from Harvard after his return in 1923.

He served as an organist for the King's Chapel for the next few years, traveling back and forth from New York and Boston, and it was during this period when he started making major contributions to music journalism in publications like Mencken's American Mercury. In 1925, he returned to Paris, and lived there – apart from visits to the US – until 1940.

He briefly traveled to Spain to collaborate with Gertrude Stein on their opera, Four Saints in Three Acts, which was completed in 1928 and featured an all-black cast in its premiere in Hartford.

Through the rest of the 1930s, Thomson produced scores for ballet, theatre, and "musical portraits," a genre in which he created more than 140 works. He returned to New York in 1940, where he remained for the rest of his life, working as the chief music critic for the New York Herald Tribune until 1951. He wrote another opera with Stein, called The Mother of Us All, based on the life of Susan B. Anthony, and considered "one of the greatest American operas" by critic Andrew Porter.

Thomson's score for the film Louisiana Story won the Pulitzer Prize in music in 1948. After his resignation from the Tribune, he worked on a third opera, Lord Byron, and wrote an autobiography (1966) and book: American Music Since 1910 (1970).