



Virgil Thomson

November 25, 1896 - September 30, 1989

New York, New York

Virgil Thomson - American composer and music critic whose plainspoken scores and tart newspaper prose made modernism sound neighborly - died in New York City on September 30, 1989. He was ninety-two. Born November 25, 1896, in Kansas City, Missouri, he absorbed hymns, parlor songs, and Baptist clarity, then carried that Midwestern ear to Harvard, Paris, and decades of New York life at the Hotel Chelsea.

With Gertrude Stein he made *Four Saints in Three Acts* and *The Mother of Us All*, operas that treated American history and holiness as danceable speech. Film scores, including *Louisiana Story*, earned him a Pulitzer; chamber works and portraits of friends kept his craft intimate. As critic for the *New York Herald Tribune* he wrote sentences sharp enough to carve a reputation and fair enough to survive rereading. He lived as if music criticism were a civic art and composition a form of hospitality.

He died in his Chelsea suite after months of declining health, leaving a shelf of scores that still sound like someone telling the truth without raising their voice.

Kansas City hymns taught cadence; Paris taught polish; Manhattan taught the long game. He composed as if American English itself were a musical instrument.

He died in New York City on September 30, 1989. Somewhere a chord is still resolving the way a good punch line lands.

Thomson's gift was lucid American music - making cleverness sound like common sense. Notice Nearby keeps

the death date so September 30 remembers the Missouri composer-critic who made modernism sound like home.

Services

Died in New York City, September 30, 1989. Composer and critic; Four Saints in Three Acts; Louisiana Story; New York Herald Tribune.

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