

**TRANSCRIPT: The Music Box, Season 6, Episode 0**

**“Music History Short - Juneteenth Jubilee!”**

**Voices: Kiana Del, Fiona Palensky, Stori Crawford, Alex Cooper**

**Length: 7:42**

**Description:** In this musical short called *Juneteenth Jubilee*, we’ll celebrate Juneteenth by exploring liberation through music! We’ll journey around the U.S, taking a look at the lives of 3 different Black composers from three different time periods. We’ll briefly cover the history of the Juneteenth holiday, and through the lives of Florence Price, Scott Joplin, and Rhiannon Giddens, we’ll investigate how the African musical tradition continues to influence American music.

*[snare drum roll begins]*

**Stori:** From Louisville Public Media... This is the Music Box! *[snare drum roll stops, cymbal crash]*  
Sponsored by PNC and the Norton Foundation.

**Kiana:** Welcome to the Music Box! I’m Kiana, and our short journey together today is all about the holiday, Juneteenth! Before we get started, I’d like to introduce you to my musical friend and our new co-host, Fiona!

**Fiona:** Happy to be here. Let’s get into the history of Juneteenth.

On June 19th, 1865, US troops were sent into Galveston, Texas to let the remaining enslaved people in the state know that they were free. *[background music begins]* Although the Emancipation Proclamation was signed nearly 3 years earlier, confederate states continued to enslave Black Americans against federal law.

**Kiana:** Now, we celebrate Juneteenth with cookouts, blues festivals, and park parties - to name a few ways we get together to honor the day. It's important to remember that this declaration did not completely get rid of slavery, as it was still legal in union states who chose to continue it. Even now, we're still fighting systemic racism, but together we'll take a look at how in the past, composers used music as a way to free themselves, even for a moment.

*[background music fades]*

**Fiona:** We'll explore the music of Black composers through history starting with Rhiannon Giddens. She combines the styles of old-time, classical, and blues music, representing the rich history of Black Appalachian musicians. Her music demonstrates the many ways in which the African music tradition influences American music.

**Kiana:** She strives to uplift the voices of those who have been silenced in music history and history in general, so we understand the liberation of musicians like Florence Price and Scott Joplin through her work. These composers lived in a time where there were laws against them being vocal about their struggle, so people like Rhiannon Giddens uncover and tell their stories to continue the tradition of Black excellence in music.

*[Rhiannon Giddens - Following the North Star begins]*

**Fiona:** Rhiannon Giddens was born in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1977. Growing up in North Carolina, she was exposed to many different types of music. *[Following the North Star* increases in volume for a few seconds, then decreases but continues in the background] In her piece called "Following the North Star" you can hear her playing a traditional fretless banjo. Though usually thought of as a

country music instrument played by white musicians, the banjo was created by enslaved Africans.

Giddens reclaims the instrument by honoring its history. Let's take a listen!

*[Fiona pauses, Following the North Star increases in volume for 11 seconds, then decreases but continues in the background]*

**Kiana:** Looking at the past can tell us how to navigate the present. For our next artist *[Following the North Star fades]* We'll take a trip to Texarkana, Texas where King of Ragtime Scott Joplin was born in 1868.

*[Scott Joplin - Maple Leaf Rag begins]*

**Kiana:** *[Maple Leaf Rag fades in volume and continues in background]* Joplin started playing piano at the age of 7 and was given free lessons by a local music teacher. He honed his skills as a musician and composer before beginning a ragtime craze at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago.

**Fiona:** The term ragtime came from the "ragged" or syncopated rhythm played by honky-tonk pianists along the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. It combines classical technique with what would later become jazz phrasing. Let's have a listen to one of Joplin's most famous compositions "Maple Leaf Rag" as played by jazz pianist Jelly Roll Morton.

*[music increases in volume for a 17 seconds, then fades into background]*

**Kiana:** Continuing to tell the stories of these musicians creates the platform they deserve in our musical landscape. *[Maple Leaf Rag fades out]* Our next artist brings us to Little Rock, Arkansas in 1887.

*[Symphony No. 1 in E minor begins, plays for 10 seconds]*

**Kiana:** *[Symphony No. 1 continues in background]* Composer Florence Price started taking piano lessons from her mother at a young age, and she published her first composition at age 11! She later worked as an organist for silent film screenings and composed songs for radio ads while working on her own music. Let's listen to her award winning piece Symphony No. 1 in E minor.

*[Symphony No. 1 in E minor increases in volume, plays for 14 seconds]*

**Fiona:** *[Symphony decreases volume, continues in background]* This piece was commissioned by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra for a program devoted to Black Composers, making her the first Black woman to have her piece played by a major orchestra. *[Symphony increases for a few seconds, decreases to background again]* Unfortunately the classical music world wasn't accepting of Black and Brown composers, especially women, *[Symphony increases for a few seconds, decreases to background again]* so her other compositions weren't appreciated during her life. It wasn't until 2009, 56 years after her death, that a box of her manuscripts was discovered in her abandoned summer home in Illinois. After that orchestras started to recognize her brilliance and began playing and recording her pieces, making her into the revered composer we know today!

*[Symphony No. 1 in E minor increases in volume, plays for 15 seconds, then decreases volume and continues in the background]*

**Kiana:** Throughout history, Black American musicians have used their music to call for and celebrate liberation. Music has and always will be a way for Black musicians to express their feelings. On Juneteenth, we acknowledge the systems that still oppress Black Americans, while celebrating the contributions that made American music what it is today.

**Fiona:** For more information, don't forget to check out the resources found by clicking on the notes of this episode. I'm Fiona!

**Kiana:** And I'm Kiana!

**Kiana and Fiona together:** And you've unwrapped another wonderful gift from the Music Box!

**Alex:** The Music Box is a production of Louisville Public Media, with support from PNC, the Norton Foundation, and the sustaining members of Louisville Public Media. This episode was written by Kiana Del and Fiona Palensky. Technical direction and sound design by me, Alex Cooper! Additional voices include Stori Crawford. Our executive producer is Daniel Gilliam. Special thanks to Kirsten Pfalzgraf, Laura Ellis, Gabrielle Jones, and Michelle Tyrene Johnson. You can get additional teaching materials and all our episodes at [musicboxpod.org](http://musicboxpod.org).

*[musical excerpt fades and podcast ends]*

**Featured Musical Excerpts:** Following the North Star by Rhiannon Giddens, Maple Leaf Rag by Scott Joplin, and Symphony No. 1 in E minor by Florence Price