

Dorsey



Thomas A Dorsey is widely known as the 'Father of Gospel Music'. Born in Georgia in America in 1899, his father was a Baptist minister and his mother a music teacher. Due to economic struggles, his father had to give up pastoring to become a labourer and his mother a domestic servant. This led Thomas to lose his connection with church.

He became a Blues pianist and performed under the name of Georgia Tom. He regularly played in jazz bars and in Al Capone's speakeasies. He published over 400 jazz and blues songs and composed hundreds more, beginning to write gospel music during the mid-1920s.

In 1932, after his first wife died during childbirth and his son two weeks later, he suffered several nervous breakdowns and contemplated suicide. It was during this period that he recommitted to God and began composing worship music.

He founded the first gospel music publishing company. He was the one of the first people to combine praise and worship with rhythm and blues. His song 'Precious Lord, Take My Hand' was a favourite of Dr Martin Luther King's, and was sung at his funeral. His work influenced many artists across genres including Mahalia Jackson, Aretha Franklin and Elvis Presley.

He died in 1993 at the age of 93.

Why Dorsey?

Dorsey demonstrates to us the values of innovation, creativity and worship. His story reminds us that music and the arts unite people and can speak to people about the bigger questions in life. Dorsey reminds us of the importance of music as worship in the Christian life and how the lyrics of music, both Christian and secular, can speak to us about profound issues. Dorsey's story contains grief and issues surrounding mental health, yet his faith and music worked as channels for his recovery. Dorsey is a role model for all musicians and creatives everywhere, encouraging them to experiment and work hard in order to reach their potential.