

Julia Perry

Born: March 25, 1924, Lexington KY

Died: April 24, 1979, Akron OH

Julia Amanda Perry was born in Lexington, KY into a talented family of musicians, teachers, and horse trainers. Her father, Abraham Perry, was a physician and an amateur pianist, skilled enough to accompany the great tenor Roland Hayes on tour. In 1915, he married Julia's mother, America Heath, also a trained classical pianist. The Perrys moved with their five daughters to Akron, OH in 1934.

Trained in the Akron Public Schools, Julia excelled in voice, piano, violin, and composition, winning numerous awards before entering the University of Akron in 1942. A year later, she earned a scholarship from the Knight Memorial Education Fund to attend Westminster Choir College in Princeton, NJ, where she earned both bachelor's and master's degrees. She received her first offer to publish a work— *Carillon Heigh-Ho* for chorus—at the age of twenty-three. With proceeds from a benefit concert in Akron in October of 1951 and the generous support of an Akron patron, she traveled to Italy to study with composer Luigi Dallapiccola. She enjoyed enormous acclaim there as a composer and vocal soloist, especially in performances of her signature work, the *Stabat Mater* for mezzo-soprano and string orchestra. She won two successive Guggenheim Fellowships, allowing her to remain in Italy off and on for several years. She also traveled throughout Europe as a lecturer and conductor, with support from the US Information Agency. Several of her works were published by major houses, including songs, choral works, orchestral pieces, and an opera based on Edgar Allan Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado*.

Returning to New York in 1959, she found that doors were not open to her as they had been in Europe. The New York Philharmonic did perform her Short Piece for Orchestra in 1965, and a smattering of other performances took place throughout the 1960s, mostly through the advocacy of friends. After 1966, she received no further offers from publishers. Even amongst her few published works, several have remained unperformed until recently. The vast majority of her work has remained unpublished, a situation The Julia Perry Project seeks to rectify. She suffered a series of strokes beginning in 1970, resulting in her inability to speak and paralysis on her right side. She continued to compose by writing with her left hand, but professional opportunities all but vanished. She died on April 24, 1979 and is buried in Glendale Cemetery in Akron.