

ARKANSAS BLACK HISTORY



Image courtesy of Chicago Gospel Music Heritage Museum

Roberta Evelyn Martin was an American gospel composer, singer, pianist, arranger and choral organizer who helped launch the careers of many other gospel artists through her group, The Roberta Martin Singers. She was one of the most significant figures during gospel music's golden age (1945–1960). Born in Helena, Arkansas (Phillips County), on February 12, 1907, Martin moved to Chicago with her family in 1917, where she studied piano. She met Thomas A. Dorsey, known as the Father of Gospel Music, through her work as the pianist for her youth choir. With the help of Dorsey, Martin created a musical group, setting the standard for the gospel choir and mixed group. She had an extremely successful recording career, featuring such hits as "Only A Look" and "Grace." Most of these songs were published by Roberta Martin Studio of Music, a publishing house in Chicago that she incorporated in 1939. This company would eventually publish compositions by gospel artists ranging from Professor Alex Bradford to James Cleveland. Her first composition, "Try Jesus, He Satisfies," was an immediate hit in 1943. She was also the choir director of the Mount Pisgah Baptist Church in Chicago for many years.

