

**Marian Anderson** - Even though she was a star and had a soaring beautiful voice, in 1939, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) refused permission for Anderson to sing to an integrated audience in Constitution Hall in DC. The incident placed Anderson into the spotlight and with the aid of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, Anderson performed a critically acclaimed open-air concert on Easter Sunday, April 9, 1939, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. She sang before an integrated crowd of more than 75,000 people and a radio audience in the millions. Anderson continued to break barriers for black artists in the United States, becoming the African American to perform under contract at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City in 1955. During her lifetime, she won many awards for her groundbreaking work and her performances.

**Camilla Williams** - career mostly overseas because of the widespread racial prejudice in the US. Made her debut at City Opera in NY in 1946 - a year before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in baseball.

**Mary Violet Leontyne Price** (born 1927) is an American soprano. Born and raised in Laurel, Mississippi, she rose to international acclaim in the 1950s and 1960s and was the first African American to become a leading performer at the Metropolitan Opera in 1961. Her debut earned her a 42-minute ovation at the end of the opera! Her voice has been described as "Rich, supple and shining, capable of effortless soaring from a smoky mezzo to the pure soprano gold of a perfectly spun high C." She earned many honors and awards, numerous honorary degrees. Price recently celebrated her 93rd birthday and can be seen in a 2017 documentary *The Opera House*. In 2019, Leontyne Price was awarded an honorary doctorate degree from Boston Conservatory at Berklee (Cathy and my alma mater).

**Simon Estes** - he was part of the first generation of black opera singers to achieve widespread success and is viewed as part of a group of performers who were instrumental in helping to break down the barriers of racial prejudice in the opera world. His career spans from 1965 and sang for presidents, foreign leaders, and in most of the major opera houses in the world. Did not sing at the MET until 1981....He signed a contract, but at the time was cautioned by Leontyne Price, about the difficult road ahead because he was a black man and the discrimination was greater. She told him, "You have a beautiful voice; you are musical, intelligent, independent, and handsome. With all of these ingredients, you are a threat. It will be more difficult for you than it was for me." However, the Met audience and critics responded favorably to Simon's house debut on January 4, 1982. Estes is currently a visiting Professor of Music in Iowa and Boston.

**Grace Bumbry** - At age 17, won a teen talent contest sponsored by St. Louis radio station of a \$1,000 war bond, a trip to New York, and a scholarship to the St. Louis Institute of Music; however, the institution would not accept her because she was black. She earned a place at the

Boston University School of the Arts and then Northwestern University. In 1958, she was a joint winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. She gained international renown in Germany at age 24. She was the first black singer to appear there. Conservative opera-goers were outraged at the idea, but her performance was so moving that by the end of the opera she had won the audience over and they applauded for 30 minutes. Her Metropolitan Opera debut was in 1965 and she was subsequently invited by Jacqueline Kennedy to sing at the White House. (She returned to the White House in 1981, singing at the Ronald Reagan inauguration.) Her advice to young singers is: "To strive for excellence, that's the answer. If you strive for excellence, that means that you are determined. You will find a way to get to your goal, even if it means having to turn down some really great offers. You have to live with that, as you have to live with yourself."

**Paul Robeson** - Princeton born American bass-baritone concert artist and stage and film actor who became famous both for his cultural accomplishments and for his political activism. Educated at Rutgers College he was a star football player (twice all American) and Columbia University earning his law degree while playing in the NFL. After graduating, he became a figure in the Harlem Renaissance, performing in plays. He studied Swahili and phonetics at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London in 1934. He gained national attention when he appeared in the 1936 movie "Showboat," where he sang "Old Man River". In the United States, he became active in the Civil Rights Movement and other social justice campaigns. His sympathies for the Soviet Union and for communism, and his criticism of the United States government and its foreign policies, caused him to be blacklisted during the McCarthy era. Due to this, his passport was revoked, he was not allowed to travel and his income suffered. In the 1960's he retired to Philadelphia and lived until his death.

**Jessye Norman** - born into segregated Georgia - Norman trained at Howard University, the Peabody Institute, and the University of Michigan. Her career began in Europe, in Munich in 1968, which led to a contract with the Deutsche Oper Berlin. Her first operatic appearance in the United States came in 1982 at the Opera Company of Philadelphia, Her first performance at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City was in 1983, performing 2 different roles in 2 different operas on the same night. A critic stated that she has one of the most opulent voices before the public today, and, as discriminating listeners are aware, her performances are backed by extraordinary preparation, both musical and otherwise. By the mid-1980s she was one of the most popular and highly regarded dramatic soprano singers in the world. "African American singers that came before me - They have made it possible for me to say, 'I will sing French opera,' or, 'I will sing German opera,' instead of being told, 'You will sing *Porgy and Bess*.' Look, it's unrealistic to pretend that racial prejudice doesn't exist. It does! It's one thing to have a set of laws, and quite another to change the hearts and minds of men. That takes longer."

**Denyce Graves** - expressive voice and wonderfully dynamic stage presence - you may know her from the PBS show "Between the Lions" where she taught sounds of letters - she has performed all over the world and is best known for her portrayal of Carmen and Delilah. She was at the NE Conservatory in Boston at the same time that Cathy and I were studying and working in Boston.

**Eric Owens** - Born in Philadelphia, Owens began studying the piano at the age of 6 at the Settlement Music School. Earned degrees from Temple and Curtis. Has sung at opera houses all over the world - MET in 2010. Head of the vocal studies department at Curtis. "It's about the work. The finished product may look easy, but it's not. If you don't enjoy working on the craft, then it is not for you. A career is going to come from working at your craft diligently until you cannot be ignored [nor] denied."

**Lawrence Brownlee** - a fellow singer at the MET says of him - "He is always in service of the music. His natural instrument is just incredibly beautiful. The word 'honey' comes to mind. He also has technical prowess and agility." "represent a new golden age in high male voices and in the singular thrill of their top notes." Anderson University in Indiana for his undergraduate degree and Indiana University Jacobs School of Music for graduate studies. The sparkling clarity of his higher register is renowned in opera houses worldwide. Brownlee made his Metropolitan Opera debut in 2007. Brownlee also serves as Artistic Advisor at Opera Philadelphia, helping the company to expand their repertoire and diversity efforts. On a personal note - He is a fan of the Pittsburgh Steelers, has 2 children (one of them has Autism Spectrum Disorder).