

Rebecca Feldhaus

Department of Music

Murray State University

Murray, KY 42071

Phone 270-809-2567

Marian Anderson: A Voice for the Seemingly Silent

“Miss Anderson, you have expressed that suffering and the beauty that has grown from it as well as any human being can ever hope to express it. Through your artistry and your life, you have set a mark toward which all of us must strive and though we may never gain that mark, we’ll be much the better for the striving”.¹

This quote from renowned tenor George Shirley testifies to Marian Anderson’s many amazing qualities and her capacity to impact others. As the first African American to sing a major role at the Metropolitan opera,² Marian Anderson was a star. She was a symbol of civil rights, an example of personal perseverance, and a source of musical inspiration. This project focuses on the last of those roles. Anderson gave so much, to so many institutions and musicians during her life, and the effect she had continues in today’s musical society.

Marian Anderson was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on February 27, 1897 to a low income family. She worked as a child scrubbing steps and helping with the wash to buy a violin.³ Anderson’s musical reputation as a singer began at the age of six when she joined the Union Baptist Church junior choir. She was

hailed as the “baby contralto” and her reputation as a musician grew. She joined the senior choir at Union Baptist Church at the age of ten.⁴ Although her vocal talent was notable, Anderson needed training from a professional. She began taking voice lessons with Giuseppe Boghetti. In his biography on Anderson, Allan Keiler writes, “Boghetti’s professionalism enriched Marian’s studies considerably”.⁵ Although her performances were steady, Anderson’s career did not reach musical stardom until after her tour to Scandinavia in the 1930’s. While in Scandinavia, Anderson received support from many fans. Racial tensions were not as pronounced as they were in America, and Anderson was free to enjoy her admiring audiences without worries of racial segregation. Anderson said:

That first trip to the Scandinavian countries was an encouragement and an incentive. It made me realize that the time and energy invested in seeking to become an artist were worthwhile, and that what I had dared to aspire to was not impossible”.⁶

While she was touring, Anderson’s name became more popular across Europe. A reviewer in *Le Jour*, a Parisian magazine, wrote:

Marian Anderson. Don’t forget this name, it will be famous before very long in Paris... The first contact of this young black artist with Paris constitutes a dazzling victory, one that calls for an even greater effect.⁷

Many notable names had positive things to say about Anderson. The famous conductor, Arturo Toscanini, declared, “Yours is a voice such as one hears once in a hundred years”.⁸

When Anderson returned home to the United States, she was invited to give several more concerts than she had prior to her Scandinavian tour. This was due, in part, to her high profile manager, Sol Hurok. Hurok, took Anderson as his client in 1934.⁹ He was a successful artistic manager who managed stars like Anderson, Anna Pavlova famous ballerina, Isadora Duncan celebrated modern dancer, Isaac Stern violinist, and Alexandre Glazounov renowned classical composer.¹⁰ Hurok describes himself in his autobiography, *Impressario*, "I am a hero-worshipper...All my life has been devoted to the pursuit of artists".¹¹

A noteworthy event that emerged from Anderson's growing career was in 1939 when she was denied use of Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C. by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). Because there were to be no African American performers in the hall, Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from the DAR in protest and was instrumental in arranging an alternative venue for Anderson's Washington D.C. concert. On Easter Sunday, 1939 Anderson gave her most famous performance on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Photographs from this event show the crowd of 75,000 people that packed the edges of the national reflecting pool on that cold Sunday.



Anderson singing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Easter Sunday, 1939.
Used with permission from the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the Van Pelt library,
University of Pennsylvania.

Anderson's post 1939 career included notable performances and awards. Anderson debuted at the Metropolitan Opera in 1955, at the age of fifty-eight. Anderson was considered, by many, to be past her prime. Nonetheless she received a standing ovation for her roll as Ulrica in Giuseppe Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*. In her later life, Anderson toured as a singer in the Far East and India, as well as Jerusalem. Her farewell tour in 1965 was a great success.¹²

Anderson won numerous awards including the Spingarn Medal in 1939.¹³ The Spingarn Medal was named after an author, critic, and co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). It is an award for an outstanding African American who has shown triumph over

adversity.¹⁴ She also won a scholarship with the National Association of Negro Musicians (NANM),¹⁵ a Rosenwald Fund scholarship in 1930,¹⁶ the Bok Award for an outstanding citizen of Philadelphia in 1941,¹⁷ the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1963,¹⁸ and a Congressional Gold Medal, “for her, ‘untiring and unselfish devotion to the promotion of the arts...’”.¹⁹ From the Bok Award Anderson earned ten-thousand dollars. With this money she established an endowment that funded a scholarship for future musicians. The endowment allotted one-thousand dollars for one lucky scholarship winner each year. In the event of a tie, the monetary prize was augmented so that each winner received a considerable amount.²⁰ Obviously, additional funds supplemented Anderson’s Bok Award winnings, because there were fifty-seven winners of the Anderson Scholarship. Correspondence between scholarship winners and Anderson, indicates that Anderson’s scholarship and the personal support that she gave bolstered these artists to success. Leontyne Price was the most famous recipient of the Marian Anderson Scholarship. Price was a successful soprano who debuted at the Metropolitan Opera in Verdi’s *Il Trovatore* in 1961 at the age of thirty-four. Price is best known for her lead roles in almost every large name opera house in the world.²¹ In letters between Price and Anderson, Price expresses gratitude for Anderson’s contributions monetarily and personally, and mentions that she also won the prestigious Spingarn Medal. “Just a note – a little late, but very sincere to thank you for the sweet wire you sent last Sunday when I

received The Spingarn Medal. You always have been and continue to be a great source of inspiration to me".²² Anderson and Price, pictured below, continued their correspondence throughout Price's career. In the photograph below, the hand written message reads, "Dearest Marian, Whoever looked more like sisters. With a heart full of love, Leontyne."



Anderson with Price at opera opening. Used with permission from the Rare Book and Manuscript Collection at the Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania.

Anderson helped to bring prestige to both individuals and organizations. The National Association of Negro Musicians (NANM) was, and continues to be, a prestigious musical organization. In a letter on NANM letterhead, Brazeal W. Dennard, the president NANM and an Anderson scholarship winner, wrote to

Anderson about how much her potential appearance at a convention would add to the affair:

Having been a former scholarship winner, and having achieved the pinnacle of success, you are our idol and model. Having you in our midst would certainly enhance our convention and be an inspiration to all.²³

His request to perform at this public gathering shows that Anderson had become a household name.

Catherine Wallace Collins, another winner of Anderson's scholarship, wrote to thank Anderson and recount her musical activities in Zurich:

I could never find the appropriate words to express how grateful I am to you for making it possible for me to continue my career and carry me this far. Since that time I have won a stipendium which enabled [sic] me to study for one year at the Zurich International Opera Studio. 1961-1962. Where I was active in public performances [sic] of various operas.²⁴

Later letters indicate that Anderson provided Collins with connections to a manager who assisted Collins during her time in the United States, as well.

Another winner of the Marian Anderson Scholarship Fund was Naomi Pettigrew, who studied not only music, but visual art as well. In her letter to Anderson, Pettigrew provided proof that Anderson aided in her career saying, "I shall never forget you, as I have so many times, the opportunity to call your name in reference to my career".²⁵

Rawn Spearman wrote that his winning the scholarship was directly related to his success with Sol Hurok, "To be more specific, I was fortunate to

win the Marian Anderson Award some years ago. This, of course, after many years of hard study, led to working under the banner of Sol Hurok".²⁶ Spearman later became a professor of music at the University of Lowell. Hurok was influential in Anderson's career and in the next generation.

In one of his many letters to Anderson, singer McHenry Boatwright mentioned his success nationally and abroad, including an operatic premiere in Hamburg and an engagement at Tanglewood, a prestigious summer festival in New England. Boatwright also asked Anderson for a letter of recommendation for a teaching position at Ohio State University. She fulfilled his request and Boatwright taught there for many years.²⁷

Another recommendation from Anderson shows her dedication to the next generation. Anderson wrote to Howard University on behalf of scholarship winner, Camilla Williams, successful soprano and subsequent professor at Indiana University:

Miss Williams has a great deal of experience and a tremendous knowledge of her art. Thus, she is well prepared for the kind of position an institution of higher learning would wish to have available the benefit of its students interested in musical endeavors.²⁸

Not all of the scholarship winners had notable careers, however many did.

Anderson was proud of the winners, saying:

To watch what the winners have done is also a source of great pride. It is not expected that 10% of those who present themselves and go off with a prize or first place, it is not supposed that all of them will be able to attain

the heights that either they or you think that they might. But percentage wise, it seems to have worked out rather well.²⁹

Scholarships winners became Grammy award winners, internationally renowned performers, and nationally recognized professors. Thus, Anderson's contribution to the world of musicians touched several generations.

Scholarship winners were not the only beneficiaries of Anderson's generosity. Composers achieved greater recognition when she sang their compositions. Anderson often chose pieces by composers who were not well known. In her autobiography, she wrote:

The greatest problem [in choosing songs] is in the English songs. I like to do a group by American and English composers in addition to a group of spirituals, but the choice is difficult... I have tried to have at least one new song by an unknown American composer on my programs each year, but this practice has to be suspended at times...³⁰

Anderson supported those American and English composers that she so wished to spotlight. Although there could be alternate reasons for these musicians' success, Anderson's contributions to them is undeniable. Proof lies again within personal correspondence.

Florence Price was best known as the first black woman to compose a symphony premiered by a major orchestra. For her symphony, Price won the Wannamaker Award in 1932.³¹ In a letter to Anderson, composer Florence Price wrote, "each broadcast of a composition of mine helps me to maintain and advance my rating in ASCAP".³² *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*

says, Price's "music was taken up by other orchestras, and she won further recognition after Marian Anderson's performance of her arrangement of *My Soul's been anchored in de' Lord* and *Song to the Dark Virgin*."³³ Although other artists performed Price's compositions, Anderson's performances put these compositions before a large, often musically sophisticated audience.

Frida Sarsen Buckey, wrote about more concrete, monetary advances that she received from her album recorded by Anderson. For the album, Buckey composed songs about Anderson's cat, Snoopy. Buckey's career became more flourishing after releasing this album. The national news program the *Today* show gave a positive review of Buckey's album. Buckey writes:

Naturally I wish you would be able to give the interview on the TODAY show, which would mean so much for the success of the album. You may recall that they found the record "TERRIFIC" and were looking forward to an interview...³⁴

Anderson was past her musical prime in the recording, but still gives each selection a unique liveliness. *Life* magazine recognized Buckey's album as, "the best children's record on the market".³⁵

A lesser-known composer, Nicholas Douty, also benefited from his relationship with Anderson. Douty wrote to Anderson with the kindness and reverence of so many others:

Please let me extend to you my sincere thanks for the kind words that you expressed to the Rosenwald Scholarship People in (sic) my behalf. They have been very generous and awarded to me a scholarship that will maintain me in Germany for several months.³⁶

As this letter states, Marian Anderson's recommendation letter in support of Douty was instrumental in Douty's receipt of the prestigious scholarship. Douty's letter serves as more proof that Anderson's ties with her scholarship winners aided them in their success.

Numerous positive statements about Anderson's inspiration of musicians exist in Anderson's correspondence at the University of Pennsylvania. Birthday cards, Mothers' day greetings, and many more personal offerings of admiration for Anderson fill the files at the collection. Proof of the positive effect that Anderson had on so many performers and composers of her time becomes increasingly evident. Many young musicians with whom Anderson had contact were successful musicians later in life.

The rare book and manuscript library contains hundreds of documents that shed light into Anderson's life and career. She was a beacon of light for African American musicians who would have otherwise remained unknown. The documents contain intimate details about how much she cared for her scholarship winners and composers. Marian Anderson exhibited her compassion in both her personal life, as well as the professional world. The opportunity to see the volumes of information on Anderson is invaluable. This information behooves musicians to take note of their inspirations, and to be inspiration to those not yet well known. The Marian Anderson collection is the finest tool

today's public has to see the magnitude that Anderson had when touching the lives of others. Both in its historical context and in the inspiration it may provide for future musicians, this collection is undoubtedly a national treasure. The manuscript collection attests to Anderson's character and power. Marian Anderson is sure to inspire musicians to success for a number of years to come.

Bibliography

- Anderson, Marian. Personal Correspondence. 9 February 1971. Marian Anderson Collection. Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Van Pelt Library at University of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, PA.
- Anderson, Marian. *My Lord What A Morning*. New York: The Viking Press, 1956.
- Boatwright, McHenry. Personal Correspondence. 16 November 1953, 16 October 1955, 8 July 1966. Marian Anderson Collection. Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Van Pelt Library at University of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, PA.
- Buckey, Frida Sarsen. Personal Correspondence. 5 May 1974, 24 March, 1960, 18 August 1960, 20 August 1964, 10 December 1965, 24 March, 1974. Marian Anderson Collection. Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Van Pelt Library at University of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, PA.
- Collins, Catherine Wallace. Personal Correspondence. No date given. Marian Anderson Collection Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Van Pelt Library at University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.
- Dennard, Brazeal W. Personal Correspondence. 5 August 1975. Marian Anderson Collection. Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Van Pelt Library at University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.
- Douty, Nicholas. Personal Correspondence. No date given. Marian Anderson Collection. Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Van Pelt Library at University of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, PA.
- Freedman, Russell. *A Voice that Challenged a Nation: Marian Anderson, and the Struggle for Equal Rights*. New York: Clarion Books, 2004.
- Hurok, Sol with Ruth Goode. *Impressario*. New York: Random House of Canada Ltd., 1946.
- Pettigrew, Naomi. Personal Correspondence. 6 April 1962. Marian Anderson Collection. Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Van Pelt Library at University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.
- "Price, Florence B(eatrice nee Smith)." *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*. Centennial ed. 2001.

"Price [nee Smith], Florence Bea(trice)." *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. 2nd ed. 2001.

Price, Florence. Personal Correspondence. 2 December 1944. Marian Anderson Collection. Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Van Pelt Library at University of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, PA.

"Price, (Mary Violet) Leontyne." *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*. Centennial Ed. 2001.

"Price, (Mary Violet) Leontyne." *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. 2nd ed. 2001.

Price, Leontyne. Personal Correspondence. 9 January 1966, 6 October 1966, no date given. Marian Anderson Collection. Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Van Pelt Library at University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

Shirley, George. Telephone Interview. 12 February 2008.

Spearman, Rawn. Personal Correspondence. No date given. Marian Anderson Collection Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Van Pelt Library at University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

Taubman, Howard. *Non-Musical Sound Recording*. Rare Book and Ms. Library Library Manuscripts. Van Pelt Library at University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA. 1955-1956.

Vehanen, Kosti. *Marian Anderson: A Portrait*. New York: McGraw Hill Book Company Inc., 1941.

Notes

-
- 1 Shirley, George, personal interview, 12 February 2008.
- 2 "Anderson, Marian," *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, 2001 ed.
- 3 Kosti Vehanen, *Marian Anderson: A Portrait* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company Inc., 1941) 9.
- 4 Russell Freedman, *A Voice that Challenged a Nation: Marian Anderson, and the Struggle for Equal Rights* (New York: Clarion Books, 2004) 5-6.
- 5 Allan Keiler, *Marian Anderson: A Singer's Journey* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000) 47.
- 6 Marian Anderson, *My Lord What a Morning* (New York: The Viking Press, 1956) 145.
- 7 Keiler, 133-134.
- 8 Freedman, 41.
- 9 Keiler, 137.
- 10 Sol Hurok with Ruth Goode *Impressario* (New York: Random House of Canada Ltd. 1946) 3.
- 11 Hurok, many pages.
- 12 "Anderson, Marian," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2001 ed.
- 13 Freedman, 70.
- 14 "Spingarn Medal," *Encyclopedia Britannica Online: Student Version*, 20 April 2008. <http://student.britannica.com/comptons/article-9337116>.
- 15 Keiler, 45.
- 16 Keiler, 91.
- 17 Freedman, 87.
- 18 Freedman, 85-86.
- 19 Freedman, 86.
- 20 "Non-musical sound recording," narr. Howard Taubman. 1955-1956.
- 21 "Price, (Mary Violet) Leontyne," *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, 2001 ed.
- 22 Leontyne Price, letter to Marian Anderson. 9 January 1966.
- 23 Brazeal W. Dennard, letter to Marian Anderson. 5 August 1975.
- 24 Catherine Wallace Collins, letter to Marian Anderson. No date given.
- 25 Naomi Pettigrew, letter to Marian Anderson. 6 April 1962.
- 26 Rawn Spearman, letter to Marian Anderson. No date given.
- 27 McHenry Boatwright, letter to Marian Anderson. 8 July 1966.
- 28 Marian Anderson, letter to Howard University c/o Dean Fox. 9 February 1971.
- 29 Taubman, 1955-1956.
- 30 Anderson, 198.
- 31 "Price, Florence B(eatrice nee Smith)" *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, 2001 ed.
- 32 Florence B. Price, letter to Marian Anderson. 2 December 1944.
- 33 "Price [nee Smith], Florence Bea(trice)," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2001 ed.
- 34 Frida Sarsen Buckey, letter to Marian Anderson. 2 August, 1964.
- 35 Buckey, 10 December 1965.
- 36 Nicholas Douty, letter to Marian Anderson. No date given.

**Winners of the Marian Anderson Scholarship
(Not in chronological order)**

Bloecher, Charlotte

-Successful classical soprano who sang many cantatas and won the Concert Artists Guild award in 1952.

Bumbry, Grace A.

-Leading mezzo-soprano (and in later career soprano) of her time. Sang with Placido Domingo, Shirley Verrett at Vienna Staatsoper and other large name opera houses.

Burton, Miriam

- Broadway performer as well as composer

Cass, Lee

- Sang professional roles on Broadway and taught voice at Carnegie Mellon University

Cowie, Margaret

- Broadway performer

Cruz, Grace de la

Daniel, Billie Lynn

- Classical soprano and voice teacher

De Valentine, William

Dickerson, Nathaniel

Dickey, Elmer

Dobbs, Mattiwilda

- Very successful coloratura soprano who sang at La Scala and debuted at the Met in 1956. Would not perform for segregated audiences, taught at University of Texas and Howard University.

Evans, Edith

- A successful actress and Golden Globe winner

Ferguson, Arnita

Farris, Judith

- Teacher of musical theatre at Southeast Missouri State University. Debuted at many opera companies and taught voice to many successful Hollywood actors

Flowers, Martha

- Successful career in Europe

Graves, Katherine

Green, Goldie Theresa

Grist, Reri

- International career, classical coloratura soprano who was in the original cast of West Side Story and sang at the Met and other big opera companies

Hall, Lillian

Hatchett, Starling Edward

Henson, Robert

- Very active in the NANM, small ensemble performer

Hinderas, Natalie L.

- Successful pianist, attended Julliard, taught at Temple University

Hodges, Betty

Jensen, Corinne

Johnson, Harold

Kriese, Gladys

- Mezzo soprano, sang at the Met, won the Liederkrantz Foundation award

Lane, Betty

- Successful singer and teacher

Laster, Georgia

- Composer

Mastrangelo, Maria

Mathis, Joyce J.

Mernick, Lillian

- Part of Harlem Philharmonic society, singer, contralto

Ormond, Nelda

Parker, Minnie

Patterson, Willis C.

- Prior Dean of music at University of Michigan

Perkinson, Coleridge Taylor

- Noted composer and conductor, co-founder of Symphony of the New World

Perry, Julia

- Studied composition at Westminster Choir College, went on to composer successfully

Pettigrew, Naomi

- Visual artist as well as vocal

Price, Leontyne *(applicant)

- Performed major soprano roles in all large name opera houses in the western world

Quivar, Florence

- Internationally successful soprano

Reid, Christina

Rowe, Doris

Schapp, Isobel

Serryla, Sivia

Simon, Joanna

- Sister to folk singer Carley Simon

Sims, Gwendolyn

Snydor, Rebecca

Spearman, Rawn

-Successful on Broadway as well as in classical world

Swift, John

Thomas, Eva Marie

Thompson, Arthur

Toscano, Carol

Verrett, Shirley

- Internationally successful soprano who still holds teaching position at
University of Michigan

Wagner, James

- Opera composer, successful in Germany

Wallace, Catherine

Walters, Gwendolyn

Walters, Janet

Warren, Elton J.

Warner, Genevieve