

Senior Citizens Music Appreciation Program

Date: Feb. 10, 2025

Time: 10:30-noon

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Great Afro-American Singers: Marian Anderson and Paul Robeson

I. Announcements

A. NJSO Trip: Sunday, April 6 State Theatre, New Brunswick

Program: Tchaikovsky, Polonaise from Eugene Onegin
Billy Childs, Diaspora
Beethoven, Symphony 9, "Choral"

II. Marian Anderson

- A. Born in 1897 in Philadelphia. Her father died when she was 12, and due to financial challenges, she had to quit her schooling to support the family, eventually graduating from high school at the age of 24. All four of her grandparents, originally from Virginia, had been slaves.
- B. Became a protégé of the Afro-American singer Roland Hayes and followed his advice to combine her love of spirituals with European art music in her recitals.
- C. Began touring in the US, including the South, in the 1920s but found greater acclaim in Europe. Signed a contract with Sol Hurok in 1934 and became one of the world's most popular classical singers.
- D. Arturo Toscanini, after hearing Anderson sing at a recital in Salzburg Austria in 1935 said Anderson had a voice "one is privileged to hear only once in a hundred years."
- E. Sang at the White House for President Franklin Roosevelt and his wife Eleanor Roosevelt in 1936.
- F. In 1939, Sol Hurok attempted to book a concert for Anderson at Constitution Hall in Washington DC, which was under the supervision of the Daughters of the American Revolution. The DAR refused to rent the hall to let Anderson sing, so Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from the DAR. Eventually, with support from the NAACP and other civil rights groups, the Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, granted a permit for Anderson to sing at the Lincoln Memorial on March 30, 1939.
- G. The Lincoln Memorial concert was broadcast nationally on NBC and a huge crowd came to see Anderson live. But after the concert ended, Anderson and her family were unable to secure a single hotel room in Washington DC due to Jim Crow segregation.
- H. In 1955, she was the first African-American singer to perform at the Metropolitan Opera as Ulrica in Verdi's *Un ballo in Maschera*, and she remained active as a

recitalist until 1964—also singing The Star Spangled Banner at the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy in 1961.

- I. Marian Anderson died at the age of 96 in 1993, having spent her life sharing her talents as a singer and providing support for the struggle for civil rights while offering financial support and counsel to many aspiring African-American singers.

III. Paul Robeson

- A. Born in Princeton NJ, 1898 Paul Robeson's mother Maria Louisa Bustill was from a free community of African-Americans in Philadelphia, while his father William Drew Robeson had been born a slave, but escaped and eventually came to Pennsylvania, where he graduated from Lincoln University and became a minister.
- B. After Paul Robeson's father lost his post in Princeton, the family moved to Somerville NJ, where Paul excelled in academics, athletics and as an orator/singer. He won competitive scholarship to Rutgers College, where he enrolled in 1915.
- C. At Rutgers, Robeson excelled in the classroom and on the athletic field, winning All-American honors in football and starring in baseball as well. He was one of the honored student speakers at his graduation in 1919, and after Rutgers enrolled in Columbia Law School, graduating in 1922.
- D. Robeson married Eslanda Cardozo Goode and they moved to Harlem in the early 1920s. Facing bigotry in his efforts to develop a legal career, Eslanda encouraged Paul to pursue acting and singing, which he did
- E. In 1924, Robeson teamed with pianist Lawrence Brown and gave an historic concert of African-American spirituals in Greenwich Village that launched his concert career. From this point onwards, Robeson expanded his repertoire to include folk songs, art songs and spoken word selections from around the world, reflecting his belief in the universal power of music.
- F. Robeson also was a film actor, and between the early 1920s and the early 1940s he made a number of films, including the best version of Kern and Hammerstein's Show Boat (1936), in which he played Joe and sang "Old Man River." Robeson became disenchanted with Hollywood and the film industry overall given the types of roles he was offered, which he felt gave no dignity to African-Americans or people of color.
- G. In the late 1920s, the Robeson family moved to London, and there Robeson became acquainted with leaders of the anti-colonial movement. Robeson believed art could not and should not be divorced from politics, and as a socialist, he worked on behalf of anti-fascist and anti-racist causes. An admirer of the Soviet Union, Robeson visited the USSR in the 1930s and learned Russian, incorporating Russian songs into his concert programs..
- H. Robeson returned to the US in 1939 and was an outspoken critic of racial segregation, as well as a strong supporter of the war effort to defeat the Axis powers. His national broadcast of "Ballad for Americans" in 1939 showcased him

at the height of his popularity, and in 1943 he portrayed the title role in Shakespeare's *Othello* on Broadway—a performance that still holds the record for the longest running Shakespearean production on Broadway.

- I. Following World War II, Robeson's politics were increasingly at odds with the anti-communist policies of the US during the Cold War, and his uncompromising opposition to racial segregation was not well-received by President Truman in a White House meeting. In 1950, the State Department revoked Robeson's passport and he was blacklisted by virtually all concert promoters, with his income falling from \$100,000 to less than \$10,000 annually. Robeson's passport was finally restored by the Supreme Court in 1958 and he resumed touring, but the 1950s had taken a toll on his health. Eslanda died in the early 1960s and Paul moved from Harlem to Philadelphia to live with his sister. He died in 1976.

IV. Recordings for Today's Session

Marian Anderson: Beyond the Music, Her Complete RCA Recordings Sony 1 94398 36492

Paul Robeson: Voice of Freedom, His Complete Columbia, RCA, HMV and Victor Recordings
Sony 1 94399 77452

V. Internet Sources

National Marian Anderson Museum:

<https://marianandersonhistoricalsociety.weebly.com/biography.html>

"Discovering Marian Anderson" Univ. of Pennsylvania Libraries

<https://mariananderson.exhibits.library.upenn.edu>

Carnegie Hall "Marian Anderson, Contralto"

<https://www.carnegiehall.org/About/History/Carnegie-Hall-Icons/Marian-Anderson>

Rutgers University "Paul Robeson at Rutgers" <https://robeson100.rutgers.edu/about-paul-robeson>

Paul Robeson House and Museum <https://www.paulrobesonhouse.org/paul-robeson/>

Paul Robeson: Here I Stand American Masters, PBS

<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/paul-robeson-about-the-actor/66/>

VI. YouTube Films

Marian Anderson

- A. Marian Anderson at the Lincoln Memorial (1939)
<https://youtu.be/mAONYTMf2pk?feature=shared>
- B. PBS Documentary on Marian Anderson: *The Whole World in Her Hands*
<https://youtu.be/Rlk-x2gkglk?feature=shared>
- C. Website Accompanying the PBS Documentary: [https://to.pbs.org/48022X4 | #AmericanMastersPBS](https://to.pbs.org/48022X4|#AmericanMastersPBS)

- D. Marian Anderson on TV, "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands", 1953
<https://youtu.be/MRGZrv0HI6k?feature=shared>
- E. Marian Anderson, 3 Songs from a 1951 Concert <https://youtu.be/mAde1-eqVA?feature=shared>

Paul Robeson

- F. Documentary: *Scandalize My Name* 2007
<https://youtu.be/YFteMBCCXNg?feature=shared>
- G. "Ol Man River" from *Showboat*, Hollywood feature film 1936
<https://youtu.be/eh9WayN7R-s?feature=shared>
- H. Paul Robeson Sings to Scottish Miners (1949)
<https://youtu.be/B0bezsmVU7c?feature=shared>
- I. Paul Robeson on Playing *Othello* (1958)
<https://youtu.be/IppiuQ0hD9g?feature=shared>
- J. *Paul Robeson: Here I Stand* Documentary <https://youtu.be/BUki-v-NvoE?feature=shared>