

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with William Warfield

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Warfield, William
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with William Warfield,
Dates:	December 14, 1999 and June 6, 2002
Bulk Dates:	1999 and 2002
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:59:46).
Abstract:	Singer William Warfield (1920 - 2002) performed on Broadway and starred in <i>Porgy and Bess</i> alongside his wife, opera legend Leontyne Price. He also taught music at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Northwestern University, and won a 1984 Grammy Award in the spoken word category. Warfield was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 14, 1999 and June 6, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A1999_003
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Opera singer and educator William Caesar Warfield was born on January 22, 1920 in West Helena, Arkansas to Robert and Bertha McCamery Warfield. Warfield first developed vocal skills by singing in the choir of his father's Baptist church. During his childhood, the Warfield family moved to Rochester, New York, where he took formal voice lessons. In 1938, during his senior year at Washington High School, Warfield won the District Award for the National Music Educators' League vocal competition, which included a scholarship to a music school. Warfield went on to attend the Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester, where he received his B.A. degree in music studies in 1942.

After a brief period of service in the U.S. Army during World War II, Warfield returned to New York and earned a part in the Broadway show *Call Me Mister*. He then was cast in two other productions, 1948's *Set My People Free* and 1950's *Regina*. In 1950, Warfield was also cast in the film adaptation of *Show Boat* and made his New York City Town Hall debut.

In 1952, Warfield was chosen to star as Porgy in a revival of the musical *Porgy and Bess*, opposite opera soprano legend Leontyne Price. They toured throughout the United States and Europe and later married. Together, they went on to perform several concerts, including a joint recital with the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1956. Throughout the remainder of the 1950s, Warfield toured with the U.S. Department of State throughout Africa, Europe, Asia and the Near East. In the 1960s, he performed in a series of European shows, including venues in Greece, Switzerland, and Austria. Warfield also began to teach music in the 1970s, first at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign from 1974 to 1990; at the University of Texas at San Antonio in 1993 and 1994; and at Northwestern University from 1994 until 2002.

On March 24, 1975, the twenty-fifth anniversary of Warfield's Town Hall debut was commemorated by a recital at

the Duke Ellington Center in New York City's Carnegie Hall. In 1984, he won a Grammy Award in the spoken word category for his narration of Aaron Copland's *Lincoln Portrait*. In addition, Warfield was a past president of the National Association of Negro Musicians and a board member of the Schiller Institute. He died on August 25, 2002.

William Warfield was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 14, 1999 and June 6, 2002.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with William Warfield was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on December 14, 1999 and June 6, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Singer William Warfield (1920 - 2002) performed on Broadway and starred in Porgy and Bess alongside his wife, opera legend Leontyne Price. He also taught music at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Northwestern University, and won a 1984 Grammy Award in the spoken word category.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Warfield, William

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Warfield, William--Interviews

African American singers--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Singer

HistoryMakers® Category:

MusicMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with William Warfield, December 14, 1999 and June 6, 2002. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with William Warfield, Section A1999_003_001_001, TRT: 0:29:10
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Warfield details his family history and talks about his Southern upbringing, despite his residing in Rochester, New York. Warfield then discusses his brothers' musical abilities. Lastly, Warfield comments on the significance of music all throughout his life.

African American families.

Music.

Video Oral History Interview with William Warfield, Section A1999_003_001_002, TRT: 0:29:00
?

William Warfield comments on his personal connection with music and details how he got into the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. Warfield recalls meeting his future business manager during his military service in World War II. He then shares a story about a racial affront he encountered while in the Army. Lastly, Warfield talks about his Town Hall debut in 1950 and the production of his audition tape for the movie Show Boat in 1951.

Music.

Eastman School of Music.

Education--New York (State)--Rochester.

United States Armed Forces--African Americans.

World War, 1939-1945.

Singing.

Video Oral History Interview with William Warfield, Section A1999_003_001_003, TRT: 0:31:08
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William Warfield talks about his friendship with singer Paul Robeson, as well as singers Dorothy Maynor and Roland Hayes. Warfield also share the advice given to him by his mentor, Marian Anderson. Warfield discusses his various Hollywood movie roles in the 1950s, primarily Show Boat and The Green Pastures. Lastly, Warfield talks about his role in the European touring company of Porgy and Bess, where he met his future wife, singer Leontyne Price.

Robeson, Paul, 1898-1976.

Anderson, Marian, 1897-1993.

Musical theater.

Motion picture acting.

Price, Leontyne.

Video Oral History Interview with William Warfield, Section A1999_003_001_004, TRT: 0:29:28
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William Warfield details his proposal, marriage to opera diva Leontyne Price, and their subsequent divorce due to their career pursuits. Warfield discusses his music teaching endeavors at the university level and gives advice to young musicians. Lastly, Warfield talks about his recordings in the spoken word and recites 'Deacon Jones' Grievance', a poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar.

Price, Leontyne.

Divorce.

Music--Study and teaching.

Spoken word poetry.

Dunbar, Paul Lawrence, 1872-1906.

Video Oral History Interview with William Warfield, Section A1999_003_001_005, TRT: 0:10:50
?

William Warfield discusses the necessity of travel and the importance of music in his life. Warfield then reflects on his legacy and comments on the current state of affairs in relation to African Americans. Lastly, Warfield performs 'Old Man River' in German.

Travel.

Music.

African Americans--Social conditions.

Singing.

Video Oral History Interview with William Warfield, Section A1999_003_002_006, TRT: 0:30:56
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William Warfield narrates his photographs.

Photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with William Warfield, Section A1999_003_002_007, TRT: 0:19:14
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William Warfield narrates his photographs.

Photographs.