

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Dr. Lena McLin

PERSON

McLin, Lena J. (Lena Johnson), 1928-

Alternative Names: Reverend Dr. Lena McLin;

Life Dates: September 5, 1928-

Place of Birth: Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Residence: Chicago, IL

Occupations: High School Music Teacher

Biographical Note

Musician, teacher, and composer, Reverend Lena McLin, was born September 5, 1928, in Atlanta, Georgia, to parents Benjamin J. and Bernice Dorsey Johnson. McLin's parents were close to Reverend A.D. Williams and Reverend William Holmes Borders; her childhood friends included young Martin Luther King, Jr. and his sister Christine. When she was five, McLin was sent to Chicago to live with her uncle, Thomas A. Dorsey, known as the father of gospel music; there she attended McCosh Elementary School and served as a young accompanist for her uncle's famed Pilgrim Baptist Church choir. After moving back to Atlanta, McLin graduated from Booker T. Washington High School in 1947. At Spelman College, McLin earned her bachelor of music degree in 1951; she also studied in Chicago at the American Conservatory of Music, Roosevelt University, and Chicago State University.

McLin started her teaching career at Julius H. Hess Upper Grade Center in 1959, moving to Hubbard High School in 1960. As a founder of the McLin Ensemble and the McLin Opera Company, McLin created performance opportunities for African American musicians. McLin taught at John Marshall Harlan High School from 1963 to 1970, leaving to teach at the new Kenwood Academy. At Kenwood Academy, acting as music department chair, McLin created a pilot curriculum that included all types of music, from classical to popular, helping to launch the careers of singer and actor Mandy Patinkin; Metropolitan Opera star Mark Rucker; jazz singers Maggie Brown and Kim English; and rhythm and blues artist Robert "R" Kelly. In 1977, McLin published a music history for youth entitled *Pulse: A History of Music*.

As a founder of Trinity Congregational Church, McLin also worked as minister of music. In 1982, McLin became founding pastor of Holy Vessel Baptist Church. McLin has published over 400 compositions, including tributes to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

and Gwendolyn Brooks; her compositions range from solo voice pieces to full orchestrations. Sought after nationally as a speaker and workshop leader, McLin is the recipient of the Outstanding Teacher Award in 1983 and numerous other awards and honorary degrees. McLin has raised a son and a daughter, and remains a resident of Chicago's South Shore community.

Related Entries

American Conservatory of Music [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Booker T. Washington High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Spelman College [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

McCosh Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Hess Upper Grade Center [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1955 to 1964]

Teacher

John Marshall Harlan High School [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1964 to 1969]

Teacher

Kenwood Academy [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1969 to 1992]

Teacher

McLin Ensemble Opera Company [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Founder

Holy Vessel Baptist Church [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Founder