

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Blanche Burton-Lyles

PERSON

Burton-Lyles, Blanche, 1933-2018

Alternative Names: Blanche Burton-Lyles;

Life Dates: March 2, 1933-November 12, 2018

Place of Birth: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Residence: Philadelphia, PA

Work: Philadelphia, PA

Occupations: Pianist;

Biographical Note

Accomplished concert pianist and music educator Blanche Henrietta Burton-Lyles was born on March 2, 1933 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Her father sang bass in the choir at Union Baptist Church which was also attended by her mentor, Marian Anderson who encouraged her young protégé to pursue a career in classical music. Marian Anderson invited Burton-Lyles to entertain guests in her home many times. By age seven, Burton-Lyles was considered a child prodigy, and in 1944, at age 11, she received an unlimited scholarship to study piano at the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music. The first African American female pianist to play at Carnegie Hall with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in 1947, Burton-Lyles entered and won the Young Audiences Competition. In 1954, she graduated from the Curtis Institute of Music where she received her B.A. degree in music.

Continuing her studies and her professional career, Burton-Lyles performed at Yale University with the New Haven Symphony and performed for fifteen years with Leroy Bostic and the Mellow Aires. In 1963, she joined the Philadelphia Board of Education as a teacher. She continued her own studies and received her B.A. degree in music education in 1971 from Temple University. Burton-Lyles retired from teaching in 1993 and became the founder and President of the Marian Anderson Historical Society, Inc. She acquired both of Anderson's historical residences in 1998 and Anderson's birthplace in 2000. Burton-Lyles, who has made it her mission to preserve Anderson's legacy, maintains both sites, which houses memorabilia, rare photos, books, and paintings relating to the contralto's life. The Anderson Residence/Museum also offers musical programs, lectures, audio-visual presentations and even private lessons.

Burton-Lyles is the recipient of numerous performance awards and humanitarian honors. These include the Shirley Chisholm Philadelphia Political Congress of Black Women Award for Achievement in Music in 1994 and the National Black Music Caucus Award for Outstanding Women in Music in 1995. For preserving Marian Anderson's legacy, Burton-Lyles has received the Mary McLeod Bethune Award from the National Council of Negro Women, 2000; Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.'s highest honor – the Sadie T. Alexander Award, 2005; Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.'s Edythe Ingram Award, 2006; the Martin Luther King, Jr. Drum Major Cultural Award, 2007; and the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Unsung Hero Award at Carnegie Hall, 2007. She was also honored with the Philadelphia 76ers' Community Service All-Star Award in 2004. For well over forty years, Burton-Lyles has enjoyed a multi-faceted career in classical music and continues to groom young classical vocal artists.

Burton-Lyles lived in Philadelphia with her family and is a member of Union Baptist Church where her mentor Marian Anderson sang as a child.

Burton-Lyles was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on December 18, 2006.

Burton-Lyles passed away on November 12, 2018.

Related Entries

Temple University [STUDENTOF]
[\[from ? to ?\]](#)

Curtis Institute of Music [STUDENTOF]
[\[from ? to ?\]](#)

Ornstein's School of Music [STUDENTOF]
[\[from ? to ?\]](#)

Temple University High School [STUDENTOF]
[\[from ? to ?\]](#)

Horace Howard Furness Junior High School [STUDENTOF]
[\[from ? to ?\]](#)

School District of Philadelphia [EMPLOYEEOF]
[\[from ? to ?\]](#)

Teacher

The O.V. Catto School [EMPLOYEEOF]
[\[from ? to ?\]](#)

Music Teacher

Marian Anderson Historical Society, Inc. [EMPLOYEEOF]
[\[from ? to ?\]](#)

Founder

Marian Anderson Historical Residence Museum [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from ? to ?]

Founder

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

Settlement Music School [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

Board Member

Curtis Institute of Music [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

Alumni Member

Marian Anderson Historical Society, Inc. [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

Founder/Creator