

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Blanche Burton-Lyles

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Burton-Lyles, Blanche, 1933-2018
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Blanche Burton-Lyles,
Dates:	December 18, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:23:38).
Abstract:	Cultural heritage chief executive and pianist Blanche Burton-Lyles (1933 - 2018) was the founder of the Marian Anderson Historical Society. She was also the first black female pianist to play at New York City's Carnegie Hall with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. Burton-Lyles was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 18, 2006, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_179
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

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.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Blanche Burton-Lyles was conducted by Shawn Wilson on December 18, 2006, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Cultural heritage chief executive and pianist Blanche Burton-Lyles (1933 - 2018) was the founder of the Marian Anderson Historical Society. She was also the first black female pianist to play at New York City's Carnegie Hall with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra.

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:

Burton-Lyles, Blanche, 1933-2018

Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Burton-Lyles, Blanche, 1933-2018 --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Pianist

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 Blanche Burton-Lyles, December 18, 2006. 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 Blanche Burton-Lyles, Section A2006_179_001_001, TRT: 0:29:07 ?

Blanche Burton-Lyles was born on March 2, 1933 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to Blanche Taylor Burton and Anthony Burton. In Philadelphia, her maternal grandparents, Henrietta Taylor and bookbinder Daniel Taylor, raised Burton-Lyles' maternal uncle, Daniel B. Taylor, who was the first black urologist in Pennsylvania; and her mother, who studied piano under composer W. Russell Johnson. Burton-Lyles' father was raised by his mother, Sydonia Burton, in Camden, New Jersey. He became a postal worker, while Burton-Lyles' mother taught piano to musicians like Trudy Pitts and Jacqueline Beach Faulcon. Burton Lyles' parents met and married in Philadelphia, and raised her in an integrated, middle class neighborhood. They attended the Union Baptist Church, where singer Marian Anderson also belonged to the congregation. Burton-Lyles read music from the age of three years old, and was a prodigious pianist. She often performed at Anderson's parties, and studied under composer Leo Ornstein at the Ornstein School of Music.

Video Oral History Interview with Blanche Burton-Lyles, Section A2006_179_001_002, TRT: 0:29:19 ?

Blanche Burton-Lyles was encouraged by singer Marian Anderson to audition for the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She was accepted in 1943, at the age of ten years old; and studied under pianist Isabelle Vengerova, alongside such peers as composer Leonard Bernstein. During this time, Burton-Lyles also attended the majority white Horace Howard Furness Junior High School, and was the youngest member of the all-black Philadelphia Concert Orchestra. In 1947, she won a national youth competition, and performed as a soloist with the New York Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall. She also played with the New Haven Symphony Orchestra at Yale University, where she experienced discrimination from her hosts; and auditioned three times for the Philadelphia Orchestra's Young People's Concerts series, but was rejected in favor of the conductor's family friend. Burton-Lyles became the first black female pianist to graduate from the Curtis Institute of Music in 1954.

Video Oral History Interview with Blanche Burton-Lyles, Section A2006_179_001_003, TRT: 0:27:11 ?

Blanche Burton-Lyles gave her first solo piano recital at seven years old; and, three years later, joined the all-black Philadelphia Concert Orchestra. In 1947, she was the first black pianist to play at Carnegie Hall with the New York Philharmonic. After graduating from the Curtis Institute of Music in 1954, Burton-Lyles earned a diploma from Temple University High School. She went on to work as a substitute music instructor in Philadelphia's public schools, where she was often the sole black teacher. During this time, Burton-Lyles also gave a series of concerts at historically black institutions like Morehouse College. Upon earning a degree from Temple University in 1970, she retired from touring, and taught music at Philadelphia's O.V. Catto School. Burton-Lyles remembers black pianist Natalie Henderson Hinderas, and Marian Anderson's performance at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City. She also describes her fundraising activities at the Marian Anderson Historical

Society, Inc.

Video Oral History Interview with Blanche Burton-Lyles, Section A2006_179_001_004, TRT: 0:29:38 ?

Blanche Burton-Lyles was invited to perform at Morehouse College by its president, Benjamin Mays, during her historically black college tour. In 1992, Burton-Lyles retired from her career in music education, and founded the Marian Anderson Historical Society, Inc. to preserve the legacy of singer Marian Anderson, and to sponsor young singers like Hope Briggs, Karen Slack and DeAndre Simmons. In 1998, Burton-Lyles purchased Anderson's former residence in Philadelphia, and created the Marian Anderson Historical Residence Museum. Later, she petitioned the Philadelphia City Council to rename the area around the museum, including Anderson's childhood home, elementary school and church, as the Marian Anderson Heritage Village. Burton-Lyles also talks about the Marian Anderson statue at Converse College in Spartanburg, South Carolina; and concludes this part of the interview by reflecting upon her life, the importance of music education in the black community and how she would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Blanche Burton-Lyles, Section A2006_179_001_005, TRT: 0:28:23 ?

Blanche Burton-Lyles dedicated her later years to the preservation of singer Marian Anderson's legacy. During this time, she organized a letter campaign that was instrumental in the inclusion of a Marian Anderson commemorative stamp as part of the U.S. Postal Service's black heritage series. The stamp was officially unveiled in Washington, D.C., in 2005. She also talks about Marian Anderson's role in the March on Washington. Burton-Lyles was a member of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, and was awarded the organization's Sadie T.M. Alexander May Week Award in recognition of her humanitarian accomplishments. She reflects upon her career, and then concludes the interview by narrating her photographs and playing several classical pieces on the piano.