Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com

Creator: Janzon, Mattiwilda Dobbs, 1925-2015

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Mattiwilda Dobbs Janzon,

Dates: March 1, 2005

Bulk Dates: 2005

Physical Description: 5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:25:17).

Abstract: Opera singer Mattiwilda Dobbs Janzon (1925 - 2015) was the first African American woman to appear in a principal role at La Scala Opera House in Milan. Dobbs also desegregated the San Francisco Opera Company and performed at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Dobbs passed away on December 8, 2015 in Atlanta, Georgia. Janzon was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 1, 2005, in Arlington, Virginia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2005_056

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Opera singer Mattiwilda Dobbs was born on July 11, 1925 in Atlanta, Georgia. The fifth of six daughters, she sang her first solo at age six and began her musical studies in piano during Dobbs’ childhood. A member of the last graduating class from Atlanta University Lab School, Dobbs earned her high school diploma in 1942.
Receiving her B.A. degree in music from Spelman College in 1946, Dobbs began her formal voice training under the direction of Naomi Maise and Willis Laurence James. After graduating, she studied with Lotte Leonard and Pierre Bernac and attended the Mannes College of Music and the Berkshire Music Center’s Opera Workshop.

Dobbs gained notoriety after winning a 1951 international music competition in Geneva, Switzerland. In 1953, Dobbs performed at the La Scala Opera House in Milan, making her the first African American woman to appear in a principal role there. After becoming the first African American to play a major role for the San Francisco Opera in 1955, she debuted at New York’s Metropolitan Opera in 1956. Refusing to appear before segregated crowds, Dobbs did not perform in her hometown of Atlanta until 1962, where she appeared in front of an integrated audience at the Municipal Auditorium. In 1973, Dobbs started teaching at the University of Texas at Austin. She also worked as a professor at Spelman College, the University of Illinois, the University of Georgia and Howard University. She ended her teaching career when she retired from Howard in 1991 and she retired from singing two years later.


The aunt of former Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson, Dobbs has been married twice. Her first husband, Spanish playwright and journalist, Luis Rodriguez, died a year into their marriage. She then married Swedish newspaper journalist Bengt Janzon for nearly forty years until his death in 1997.

Dobbs passed away on December 8, 2015 in Atlanta, Georgia.

**Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with Mattiwilda Dobbs Janzon was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on March 1, 2005, in Arlington, Virginia, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Opera singer Mattiwilda Dobbs Janzon (1925 - 2015) was the first African American woman to appear in a principal role at La Scala Opera House in Milan. Dobbs also desegregated the San Francisco Opera Company and performed at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Dobbs passed away on December 8, 2015 in Atlanta, Georgia.
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:

Janzon, Mattiwilda Dobbs, 1925-2015

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
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


Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual.
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 Mattiwilda Dobbs Janzon, Section A2005_056_001_001, TRT: 0:29:10 2005/03/01

Video Oral History Interview with Mattiwilda Dobbs Janzon, Section A2005_056_001_002, TRT: 0:30:20 2005/03/01

Video Oral History Interview with Mattiwilda Dobbs Janzon, Section A2005_056_001_003, TRT: 0:29:50 2005/03/01

Video Oral History Interview with Mattiwilda Dobbs Janzon, Section A2005_056_001_004, TRT: 0:30:02 2005/03/01

Video Oral History Interview with Mattiwilda Dobbs Janzon, Section A2005_056_001_005, TRT: 0:25:55 2005/03/01