

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Denyce Graves

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Graves, Denyce
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Denyce Graves,
Dates:	October 22, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	Betacame SP videocassettes ().
Abstract:	Opera singer Denyce Graves (1964 -) was most known to operatic audiences for her portrayals of the title roles in, "Carmen," and "Samson et Dalila." In these roles, Graves has performed in such venues as the Metropolitan Opera, Vienna Staatsoper, Royal Opera – Covent Garden, San Francisco Opera, Opera National de Paris, and Lyric Opera of Chicago. Graves was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 22, 2005, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_272
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Recognized worldwide as one of today's most exciting vocal stars, Denyce Graves continues to gather unparalleled popular and critical acclaim in performances on four continents. *USA Today* identified her as one of the "singers most likely to be an operatic superstar of the 21st Century," and after a recent performance in Atlanta, the *Journal-Constitution* exclaimed, "if the human voice has the power to move you, you will be touched by Denyce Graves."

Graves' career has taken her to the world's great opera houses and concert halls. The combination of her expressive, rich vocalism, elegant stage presence, and exciting theatrical abilities allows her to pursue a wide breadth of operatic portrayals as well as delight audiences in concert and recital appearances. Graves has become particularly well-known to operatic audiences for her portrayals of the title roles in *Carmen* and *Samson et Dalila*. These signature roles have brought Graves to the Metropolitan Opera, Vienna Staatsoper, Royal Opera – Covent Garden, San Francisco Opera, Opera National de Paris, Lyric Opera of Chicago, The Washington Opera, Bayerische Staatsoper, Arena di Verona, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Opernhaus Zurich, Teatro Real in Madrid, Houston Grand Opera, Dallas Opera, Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires, Los Angeles Opera, and the Festival Maggio Musicale in Florence.

Graves made her debut at the Metropolitan Opera in the 1995-96 season in the title role of *Carmen*. She returned the following season to lead the new Franco Zeffirelli production of this work, conducted by James Levine, and she sang the opening night performance of the Metropolitan Opera's 1997-98 season as *Carmen* opposite Plácido Domingo. She was seen again that season as Bizet's gypsy on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera for Domingo's 30th Anniversary Gala, and she made her debut in Japan as *Carmen*, opposite the Don Jose of Roberto Alagna. Also, in 1997, PBS Productions released a video and audio recording titled, *Denyce Graves: A Cathedral Christmas*, featuring Graves in a program of Christmas music from Washington's National Cathedral. This

program airs every Christmas season on PBS. Graves also appeared in a new production of *Samson et Dalila* opposite Domingo at the Metropolitan Opera, and she was partnered again with Domingo in the 1999 season-opening performances of this work for the Los Angeles Opera. She was seen as Saint Saens' seductress with Royal Opera, Covent Garden and The Washington Opera, both opposite Jose Cura – the latter under the baton of Maestro Domingo, as well as with Houston Grand Opera. Her debut in this signature role came in 1992 with the Chicago Symphony at the Ravinia Festival under the direction of James Levine and opposite Mr. Domingo and Sherrill Milnes, and she made a return engagement to the Festival in this same role in 1997.

Graves appears continually in a broad range of repertoire with leading theatres in North America and Europe. She recently sang her first performances of Judith in a William Friedkin production of Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle* in her return to Los Angeles Opera. Highlights of the mezzo-soprano's other recent appearances include her first performances of the title role in *La Perichole* with the Opera Company of Philadelphia; a rare double-bill of *El amor brujo* and *La vida breve* specifically mounted for her by Dallas Opera; Federica in the Metropolitan Opera's new production of Luisa Miller, led by James Levine; and Nicklausse in *Les contes d'Hoffmann* with The Washington Opera. Graves' debut with the Theatre Musical de Paris – Chatelet was a Baba the Turk in a Peter Sellars/ Esa-Pekka Salonen production of *The Rake's Progress*, and she returned to Covent Garden as Cuniza in Verdi's *Oberto* after her debut performances as Carmen. Her debut at Teatro alla Scala was as the High Priestess in *La vestale* led by Riccardo Muti, and she soon returned as Giulietta in a new production of *Les contes d'Hoffmann* and as Mere Marie in the Robert Carsen production of *Les dialogues des Carmelites*. Her first performances as Dulcinee in Massenet's *Don Quichotte* were with The Washington Opera. She appeared at Teatro Bellini in Catania in the title role of *La favorite*, and audiences in Genoa saw her first performances of Charlotte in *Werther* soon after her debut there as Carmen. In 1999, Graves repeated the role of Charlotte for Michigan Opera Theatre opposite the Werther of Andrea Bocelli in his first staged operatic performances. Her debut in Austria came as Carmen with the Vienna Staatsoper, and she has also been seen in this role with Grand Theatre de Geneve, Genoa's Teatro Carlo Felice, the Bregenz Festival, and festivals in Macerata, Italy and San Sebastian, Spain. Graves gave her first performances of Adalgisa in *Norma* for Opernhaus Zurich. In the 1999-2000 season, Graves gave her first performances as Amneris in *Aida* with Cincinnati Opera.

Graves has worked with leading symphony orchestras and conductors throughout the world in a wide range of repertoire. She has performed with Riccardo Chailly, Myung-Whun Chung, Charles Dutoit, Christoph Eschenbach, James Levine, Zubin Mehta, Lorin Maazel, Kurt Masur, Riccardo Muti, and Mstislav Rostropovich. Graves has appeared in Verdi's *Messa di Requiem*, Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*, Mussorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death*, Chausson's *Poeme del'amour et de la mer*, Ravel's *Sheherazade*, Honegger's *Antigone*, and Richard Danielpour's *Margaret Garner*, an opera whose title role was written specifically for Graves.

In 2001, Graves gave a series of appearances in response to the tragic events in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Shanksville, Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001. She was invited by President George W. Bush to participate in the National Prayer Service in Washington's National Cathedral in which she sang, "America, the Beautiful" and "The Lord's Prayer." This event was televised worldwide and was followed by an appearance on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in a live musical program of "Healing through Gospel Music." Graves has gone on to participate in numerous other benefit concerts, and RCA Records released a recording of patriotic songs sung by Graves, whose proceeds are given to various groups affected by the events of September 11, 2001.

In 2003, Graves was appointed as a Cultural Ambassador for the United States, and she now travels around the world under the auspices of the State Department appearing in good-will missions of musical performances, lectures, and seminars. Her first trips in 2003 brought her to Poland, Romania, and Venezuela.

Graves has been the recipient of many awards, including the Grand Prix du Concours International de Chant de Paris, the Eleanor Steber Music Award in the Opera Columbus Vocal Competition, and a Jacobson Study Grant from the Grand Prix Lyrique, awarded once every three years by the Association des amis de l'opera de Monte-Carlo, and the Marian Anderson Award, presented to her by Miss Anderson.

Graves is a native of Washington, D.C., where she attended the Duke Ellington School for the Performing Arts. She continued her education at Oberlin College Conservatory of Music and the New England Conservatory. In

1998, Graves received an honorary doctorate from Oberlin College Conservatory of Music. She was named one of the “Fifty Leaders of Tomorrow” by *Ebony* magazine and was one of *Glamour* magazine’s 1997 “Women of the Year.” In 1999, New York’s WQXR Radio named Graves one of classical music’s “Standard Bearers for the 21st Century.”

Graves was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 22, 2005.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Denyce Graves was conducted by Angela Bassett on October 22, 2005, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on Betacame SP videocassettes. Opera singer Denyce Graves (1964 -) was most known to operatic audiences for her portrayals of the title roles in, "Carmen," and "Samson et Dalila." In these roles, Graves has performed in such venues as the Metropolitan Opera, Vienna Staatsoper, Royal Opera – Covent Garden, San Francisco Opera, Opera National de Paris, and Lyric Opera of Chicago.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

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

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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:

Graves, Denyce

Bassett, Angela (Interviewer)

N/A (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Graves, Denyce--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Opera 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 Denyce Graves, October 22, 2005. 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