

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Jessye Norman

PERSON

Norman, Jessye

Alternative Names: Jessye Norman;

Life Dates: September 15, 1945-September 30, 2019

Place of Birth: Augusta, Georgia, USA

Residence: New York, NY

Work: NY

Occupations: Opera Singer

Biographical Note

Opera singer Jessye Norman was born on September 15, 1945 in Augusta, Georgia to Janie King Norman and Silas Norman. She graduated from Augusta's Lucy C. Laney Senior High School. Following her participation in Philadelphia's Marian Anderson Vocal Competition in 1960, Norman received a full-tuition scholarship to attend Howard University, where she completed her B.M. degree in 1967. She then earned her M.M. degree from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in 1968.

After Norman won the ARD International Music Competition in Munich, Germany in 1969, Egon Seefehlner invited her to perform as Elisabeth in *Tannhauser* with Deutsche Oper Berlin. She signed a three-year contract with the opera company and, in 1970, she performed in *Deborah*, followed by *L'Africaine* and *Le nozze di Figaro* at the Berlin Festival. In 1972, Norman sang Verdi's *Aida* at La Scala in Milan. Norman continued to perform internationally as a soloist and recitalist. She returned to the stage, performing in *Oedipus rex* and *Dido and Aeneas* with the Opera Company of Philadelphia in 1982. The following year, Norman performed at the Metropolitan Opera for its 100th anniversary season. Following a 1987 performance with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Norman was featured in *Erwartung*, the Metropolitan Opera's first single-character production, and *Bluebeard's Castle* in 1989. In 1990, she performed in *Tchaikovsky: 150th Birthday Gala* from Leningrad along with Yo-Yo Ma and Itzhak Perlman. Her first appearance with the Lyric Opera of Chicago was in the title role of *Alceste* in 1990. She was cast as *Jocasta* in a televised production of *Oedipus rex* at the inaugural Saito Kinen Festival Matsumoto in 1993, the same year she was featured in *Ariadne auf Naxos* at the Metropolitan Opera, followed by *The Makropulos Case* in 1996. In 1998, she performed at Carnegie Hall in *Sacred Ellington*,

featuring music by Duke Ellington, and released a jazz crossover project, *I Was Born in Love with You*, with Michel Legrand. In 2002, she established the Jessye Norman School of the Arts, a tuition-free, after school arts program in her hometown of Augusta, Georgia. In collaboration with New York City cultural institutions, Norman curated *Honor!: A Celebration of the African American Cultural Legacy* in 2009. With seventy-five recordings to her credit, in 2010, Norman released *Roots: My Life, My Song*.

A five-time Grammy Award winner, including the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, Norman has received forty-five honorary doctorate degrees, is a Kennedy Center Honoree and holds the National Medal of the Arts. Graduate fellowships at the University of Michigan's School of Music have also been named in her honor. Norman serves as a spokesperson for The Partnership for the Homeless and was named an honorary ambassador to the United Nations. Additionally, she serves on the board of trustees of the New York Public Library, The New York Botanical Garden, The Dance Theatre of Harlem, Paine College and Carnegie Hall.

Norman passed away on September 30, 2019.

Jessye Norman was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on November 21, 2016 and April 27, 2017.

Related Entries

Walker Traditional Elementary School [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

A.R. Johnson Health Science and Engineering Magnet Middle and High School

[STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Howard University [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Mus. B.

University of Michigan [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Mus.M.

Lucy C. Laney High School [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Diploma

Deutsche Oper Berlin [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1969 to 1970]

Opera Singer

Temple University Music Festival [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1970 to 1970]

Opera Singer

Various [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1971 to 1975]

Opera Singer

Various [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1980 to ?]

Opera Singer

Jessye Norman School for the Arts [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 2003 to ?]

Founder

Teatro Communale [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1970 to 1970]

Opera Singer

Carnegie Hall [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board Member

New York Public Library [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board

City-Meals-On-Wheels, New York City [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board

Dance Theatre of Harlem [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board

LUPUS Foundation [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board member; National Spokesperson

Augusta Opera Association [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board of Trustees

Sigma Alpha Iota [MEMBEROF]
[from 1965 to ?]

Charter Member