

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Willis C. Patterson

PERSON

Patterson, Willis C.

Alternative Names: Willis C. Patterson;

Life Dates: November 27, 1930-

Place of Birth: Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA

Residence: Ann Arbor, MI

Occupations: Music Professor

Biographical Note

Professor and opera singer Willis Patterson was born on November 27, 1930, in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He received his B.M. degree in 1958 and M.M. degree in 1959 from the University of Michigan, in Ann Arbor. From 1965 to 1966, he studied German Lieder at the Staalische Hochschule für Musik in Freiburg, West Germany, on a Fulbright Fellowship. He received his Ph.D. degree in education administration and supervision in 1993 from Wayne State University, in Detroit, Michigan. He also attended Eastern Michigan University and the Manhattan School of Music.

Patterson joined the Air Force in 1949. He began teaching at Southern University and A&M College, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in 1959. In 1962, he accepted a professorship at Virginia State University, in Petersburg, Virginia. In 1963, he performed in Amahl and the Night Visitors. In 1968, Patterson became the first African American professor in the School of Music, Theater, and Dance at the University of Michigan. In 1969, he founded the Willis C. Patterson Our Own Thing Chorale and became the director of the University of Michigan Men's Glee Club, a position he held until 1975. That year, Patterson was appointed chair of the Department of Voice. He published an anthology of African American music, *Anthology of Art Songs by Black American Composers*, in 1977. In 1979, Patterson was appointed associate dean of the School of Music, Theater, and Dance. In 1985, he began serving as music director of The First Congregational Church of Ann Arbor. Patterson retired from the University of Michigan in 1999. Patterson has performed in numerous operas, including *Porgy and Bess*, *Fidelio*, and *La Bohème*.

Patterson became executive secretary of the National Black Music Caucus in 1977 and served as president of the National Association of Negro Musicians from 1990 to 1995. He is a co-founder of the Ann Arbor Community Fund.

Patterson is a recipient of the Marian Anderson Award.

Patterson and his wife, Francis Patterson, live in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He has four children.

Willis Patterson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on March 18, 2022.

Related Entries

Jones School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Pioneer High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

High School Diploma

Eastern Michigan University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

B.M.

University of Michigan [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

B.M.

University of Michigan [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

M.M.

Wayne State University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Ph.D.

United States Air Force [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1949 to 1952]

Serviceman

Southern University [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1959 to 1962]

Professor

Virginia State University [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1962 to 1968]

Professor

NBC [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

King Balthazar - Amahl and the Night Visitor

University of Michigan [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1968 to 1999]

Professor

The Willis C. Patterson Our Own Thing Chorale [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Founder

National Black Music Caucus [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Executive Secretary

National Association of Negro Musicians [MEMBEROF]

[from 1990 to 1995]

President

First Congregational Church of Ann Arbor [MEMBEROF]

[from 1985 to ?]

Musical Director

Ann Arbor Community Fund [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Co-founder

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