



A TIMELINE OF THE WOMEN
WHO CHANGED AMERICA



November 2020 Her Story ENewsletter Opera Singers

In this time of the COVID pandemic, cultural institutions are precluded from their normal activities. This includes opera, theater, the ballet and the symphony. To honor these cultural institutions, we profile two opera singers: Marian Anderson and Marilyn Horne.



At the age of 13, **Marian Anderson** began singing in her church choir. She began taking voice lessons at 15, and by 22, she had sung at the National Baptist Convention. A 1924 concert at New York's Town Hall was not well attended and she became discouraged. However, in 1925, she reigned supreme against 300 rivals and sang in the New York amphitheater accompanied by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. A contralto with a powerful, operatic voice, Anderson performed primarily for black audiences in the U.S. due to segregation. She was better received in Europe and performed for royalty in Sweden and Denmark. Upon her return to the U.S., she sang to great acclaim at Carnegie Hall and the New York Town Hall.

Her Easter Sunday 1939 concert, sung in front of the Lincoln Memorial, brought a huge crowd as well as a focus on segregation. She had applied to sing at Constitution Hall, but the owners, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), denied her use of the facility because of her intention to host an integrated audience. Famously, Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from the DAR because of this denial. In 1955, Anderson became the first African American to sing at The Metropolitan Opera in New York City. The recipient of the National Medal of Arts and many other honors, Marian Anderson has been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.



One of the world's greatest mezzo-sopranos, **Marilyn Horne** was born into a musical family who recognized and fostered her talent. When she was 11, the family moved to California so that she could pursue a musical career. Before long, she was singing backup roles for Metro-Goldwyn Mayer movies. Her voice was dubbed for Dorothy Dandridge in the 1954 movie *Carmen Jones*. After a stint in television, she realized that her love was opera.

Her big break in opera occurred in 1960. When the star became sick, Horne was invited to sing with the San Francisco opera as Marie in *Wozzeck*. From that time forward, she was known as part of American opera. Horne brought a larger audience to opera through her television performances. She performed at President Bill Clinton's inauguration in 1993. Her career spanned twenty-six seasons at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City and thirty-nine seasons with the San Francisco Opera. A fifteen-time Grammy nominee, she received the award four times. Her many other honors include honorary doctorates, foreign awards, the National Medal of Arts; she was also bestowed with the Kennedy Center Honor. After retiring from the stage, she has devoted herself to encouraging aspiring singers. Her archive and museum is housed at the University of Pittsburgh.

Marian Anderson and Marilyn Horne are among the more than 850 women profiled in our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. Women's accomplishments continue to inspire and encourage us all. Continue to help us tell women's stories!

Charlotte Waisman and Jill Tietjen

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