



Lela Anderson

Arranger, Composer, Music Educator

Lela Anderson, a native of Houston, Texas, comes from a musical family. Her father, a school principal, who lived during the era of rag-time, masterfully played Scott Joplin's Maple Leaf Rag on the piano. She loved hearing his bass voice singing hymns in church. Her mother, a teacher who also played piano, loved choral music and insisted Lela participate in choir at school. Anderson's sister began playing for churches at age 10 and accompanied her high school choir. The high school choir directress was their cousin. From childhood to adulthood Anderson cherished watching musical TV shows with her grandmother, who loved the Lawrence Welk Show, the Larry Kane Show, American Bandstand, and Soul Train. While growing up Anderson loved the orchestral music she heard in school, on trips to hear the symphony, as well as on the radio, TV and in cartoons and films. She wanted to someday write music for movies.

Exhilarating choral experiences in high school heightened Anderson's interest in music and developed an excellent foundation in music theory. The director, her cousin Toma Morrison, was highly regarded. She taught the choir music of composers as Vulpis, Palestrina, Gibbons, Morley, Herbert, Dett, Wilhousky, Dawson, Bright, Reece, Bairstow, and Rogers and Hammerstein. In later years Anderson accompanied her cousin, and her cousin's son in church services and in church musicals.

Dr Robert Henry, a student of John Finley Williamson and Charles Hirt, was Anderson's choir and voice teacher at Prairie View A&M University. Under Henry's direction Anderson developed an understanding of the voice, and expectations of choral singing through singing in operas, and music by J.S. Bach, Handel, Mozart, Brahms, Verdi, Joplin, Menotti, Dett, Dawson, Shaw-Parker, Vaughn Williams, Hindemith, Honegger, Taylor, and Schoenberg. While touring to New York, Dr. Henry and his choir made a stop at the home of composer William Dawson, where Anderson and her fellow choir members were most humbled and honored to visit and sing his music for him. Anderson remembers philanthropist Ima Hogg being in the audience at one of the P.V. choir's performances in the Winedale Festival, in Roundtop, Texas. Miss Hogg enjoyed them tremendously, and recommended the choir be given greater opportunities to be heard. On her recommendation, the choir was engaged to sing in a special concert in Houston and Prairie View, Tx with Ray Charles, composer/conductor Quincy Jones and the Houston Symphony, in recognition of his Charles' 25 years in show business. The choir also sang in Houston Grand Opera's productions of AIDA and TREEMONISHA. H.G.O.'s David Gockley engaged Prairie View's choir to sing for a private reception in San Antonio for the former U.S. Presidential First Lady 'Lady Bird' Johnson and one of her daughters. Among the guests were members of the Astor and Rockefeller families. This was special honor for the students as they not only sang, but socialized with Lady Bird and the guests as well.

Anderson received B.A. and M. A. degrees in Music Education from Prairie View A&M University, with further study done at the University of North Texas and the University of Houston. She has studied with composers David Cope, Robert Avalon, Lucius Wyatt, Paris Rutherford, Michael Horvit, and Karim al Zand. Collegiate and private piano instructors were Rudolph von Charlton, Uriel Ahuvi, Carolyn Catalon, Connally Garrett, James Ashford, Robert Henry, and Danny Kelley. Anderson has also been a student in the master classes, symposiums, and workshops of composers, artists and educators as Philip Tacka, Micheal Houlahan, Lamar Robertson, Alice Parker, George Walker, Ulysses Kay, David Baker, Hale Smith, Roque Cordero, Leon Bates, Leon Fleisher, Barbara W. Baker, Donald Grantham, Lee Evans, Billy Taylor, Richard Smallwood, Edwin Hawkins, Margaret Doroux, Jill Scott, George Duke, Joseph Joubert, Horace Boyer, Glenn Burleigh, Chester Baldwin, Donald Vails, and Barry Eastmon.

Anderson has had diverse musical experiences. While in junior high she was co-lyricist of the school song, sang in choir, and joined a small all-girls R&B singing group. Composing their own songs, the girls sang at school and in a talent expose on Houston's radio station KCOH. Renown jazz saxophonist Arnette Cobb was a guest performer, and Clifton "King Bee" Smith was the announcer. Lela is a charter member of the Houston Ebony Opera Guild, founded by Dr. Robert Henry. She has also performed with the Houston Symphony Chorus, Houston Grand Opera, and on The Joy of Music with Diane Bish.

Notable conductors of these organizations in which she has sung includes Moses Hogan, Roland Carter, David Wehr, Charles Hausmann, John DeMain, Gunther Schuller, Sergiu Commisiona, Clyde Owen Jackson, Jan Taylor, Calvin Fuller, and Robert Henry. While at University of North Texas she sang under Stephen Farrish and Frank McKinley.

For 31 years Anderson taught music in grades pre-K to 12 in public, charter, private schools, and at the collegiate level. Subjects taught included general music, choir, guitar and class piano. Her students won numerous local and national honors. Her class piano students performed standard repertoire. Her unique arrangements for 4 - 12 synthesizers/pianos played by 4-24 students afforded more students opportunity. The late Brentwood Baptist Church Minister of Music Ed Artis said of them "They sound like a symphony!". Anderson's transcriptions were true to the artists' recordings. Music of artists as Ray Charles, Selena, Quincy Jones, Prince, Stevie Wonder, Kirk Franklin, Jerry Lee Lewis, and the Sounds of Blackness. Her piano students were taught improvisation, and created solos in R&B pieces they composed or in well known R&B songs. Ray Charles sent complimentary tickets to the students to attend his Houston concert, after hearing a recording of Anderson's arrangements for her keyboard ensembles of grades K-6 performing some of his hits including Hit the Road Jack, Living for the City and I'll Be Good to You. Her 4th grade piano class learned Anderson's arrangements of Selena's hits "Bidi-Bidi Bom-Bom" and "I Could Fall In Love" and performed them on Houston's ABC-Channel 13 TV show VIVA HOUSTON for a special that honored the slain singer one year after her death. Guest artists that visited Lela's piano classes included Charles Rhinehart, Jr., Greg Curtis, Moses Hogan, Roland Carter, and McClendon and Kelley. Students also met in-person and observed live performances of pipe organists Steve Roddy and Herndon Spillman, concert pianists Leon Bates and Emmanuel Ax, and The Sounds of Blackness. Miss America 1991, pianist Marjorie Vincent congratulated Anderson's piano students on their studies and accomplishments, during a stop in Houston while on her national tour.

In over 45 years of service to God, Lela has worked as a pianist, director and clinician in numerous churches. She also has worked as a music transcriber and copyist. One notable client was the former Minister of Music of Houston's Grace Presbyterian Church, pianist and arranger Linda McKechnie. Anderson copied by hand, McKechnie's manuscript for consideration of publication of her handbell arrangement of "Blessed Assurance".

Anderson has been honored by Who's Who Among America's Teachers in 1999, 2002, and 2005, by Who's Who in America, and International Who's Who in Music. Elementary and secondary schools have honored her as Teacher of the Year, along with Black History Maker and Visionary in the Arts. Other honors have been bestowed by the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, the Vanguard Premieres Composition Contest, and Billboard Magazine's American Songwriting Contest. Lela Anderson's music is published by Alliance Music, *by grace* Publications, Hinshaw Music, and Oxford University Press.

Charles Ward, FINE ARTS EDITOR of the Houston Chronicle reported "Teacher-Composer, Can and Does" , and "A composer with a burgeoning national reputation" in his article about the 2003 performance of her music at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts by the Choral Arts Society of Washington. Her music has since earned three more performances at the Kennedy Center. Organizations that have performed her instrumental and choral music includes ACDA Central Honor Choir, ACDA East Director's Chorus, ACDA Southwest HBCU Honor Choir, African-American Church Music Symposium-Texas Southern University, Angelo State University Composers Symposium, Arkansas Tech University, Barbara Tucker and a Chosen Few, Bella Vista Baptist Youth-Houston, Bella Voce - Vermont, Brazeal Dennard Chorale, Brentwood Baptist Church-Houston, Brigham Young University, Brockton High School, Brookhaven Choral Society-Dallas, Burrus Elem. Choraleers-Houston , Canto Deo, Chicago a cappella, Columbia Union College, Detroit School of Arts, Ebony Heritage Singers, Eisenhower High School -Houston, First UMC of Tulsa, Galveston Heritage Chorale, Goddard UMC-Ft. Smith., Gospel Music Workshop of America, Greater Galilee Baptist Church-Houston, Hampton University Choir Dir. Conf., Harding University European Tour, Highland Youth Ensemble-Tn., Holman UMC-Los Angeles, Houston Ebony Opera Guild, Jerusalem Baptist Church.-Houston, Huston-Tillotson University-Austin, Jewel Kelley Chorale of Friendship West Baptist Church-Dallas, Kashmere High School Choir-Houston African Tour, Kodaly Educators of Texas-Summer Institute, Larry Parsons Chorale, Messiah University, Metro Singers of Hyattsville, Mt. Ararat Baptist Church Women's Chorus-Houston, Mt. Olive Baptist Church-Galveston, National Baptist Convention Choir-Houston, New Dimensions Spiritual Festival-Shreveport, 105 Voices of History HBCU National Choir, Oral Roberts University , Orr-Davis Turning Hearts Ministries Youth Workshop-Brown Missionary Baptist Church-Mississippi, Philadelphia Gospel Seminar, Pilgrim Congregational Church Spirituals Concert-Houston, Prairie View A& M University European Tour, Quinlan Singers-Austin, Regis School for the Sacred Heart, Second Presbyterian Church-Memphis, Southeastern Oklahoma State University, Rutgers University, Sounds of Abounding Grace-Reedy Chapel, St. Andrew AME Church - Houston, St. Matthews' UMC-Houston, University of Dayton-Ohio, University of Texas-Austin, Vanguard Voices, Wheatley High School-Houston, and Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church-Houston.

Just before retiring from full-time teaching, Anderson stepped out on faith to write music professionally. In reflection, Anderson credits being obedient as a child to her prayerful parents, and her widowed mother's insistence in her choral singing for influencing her path in life which led her into unimaginable experiences and successes. With a natural love for artistic creativity, Anderson intuitively wrote a song the day a piano arrived at her house for her 8th birthday. It had one chord, a 5-note melody and two words for lyrics! She thought she was Beethoven!!! Today, in *this* point in her life , she is purposely and joyfully dedicated to endeavors that make her music "speak" , as the works and words of J.S. Bach proclaim , to give glory to God, and refresh the soul!