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STATEN ISLAND TIME CAPSULE

Memoirs: Anthony Turner, vocal performer and teacher

by PEARL MINSKY



Anthony Turner was quick to agree to go to the Arthur Kill Correctional Facility when he learned that one of the inmates had been on his way to a career as a singer when he was sent to prison — his singing lessons and career potential over.

As a result, the inmate was having dangerous psychological problems. Turner arranged to meet with him and soon was giving him private lessons, which continued weekly for six years.

This care helped the inmate overcome his issues. Since the man was released, he has held several jobs and is still hopeful that he may have a career as a singer. He did have one concert in which he participated and Turner was there to cheer him on.

Where were you born? Where did you go to school?

Des Moines, Iowa. After my public school education, I received my bachelor of music degree from Simpson College in Indianola, Iowa, and my master of music degree from the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. Both of my degrees are in performance. I am the first person in my family to go to college.

When did you move to Staten Island?

I moved to Staten Island in August of 2001. I was living in downtown Jersey City prior to moving. Staten Island reminds me of my hometown in Iowa. My apartment is amazing and I like the idea of not paying Manhattan prices. Living on the North Shore makes traveling into Manhattan a breeze.

Are you in any personal relationship? If yes, tell us about that person.

I met my partner, Brian, in November of 1997. It is hard to believe we are celebrating 20 years together. Brian is a psychotherapist and has his own practice in Manhattan. He incorporates spiritualist values in his practice and is extremely busy working with Broadway types in all aspects of performing. I most enjoy Brian's understanding of "breath" fostering good living. He is an accredited minister and has officiated at several weddings.

When and how did you become a professional singer?

I have never not sung for as long as I can remember. Church gave me a start at 4, maybe 5 years of age. Formal lessons started when I was 15 and, from there, I never really looked back. I feel that I was chosen to do what I do and there is not a day that goes by when I do not say “thank you” to the creator or the teachers who were placed in my life. Above all was the undying love and support of my mother.

How do you select your repertoire?

To pick a favorite song or songs or genre of music I love to sing most can vary given the day. I am somewhat known for including slave songs of my people in most of my recitals. The sheer beauty, joy and hope to be found in the melodies of the Negro spiritual is so incredible, given the nature of the situation from which these songs arose. On some level, my favorite music is what I am performing at the time. Having chosen the right material means I can give the best of me to the audience, which is what they want and which is what I am charged to do.

Tell us about your charity efforts.

I have performed for women’s clubs, various kinds of organizations and church functions to assist them in their efforts to raise funds for their own needs or for charities. Unfortunately, due to the nature of my career, it is difficult to make commitments far ahead. I am out of town quite a bit. But, I will always give my assistance if I am available.

What is the most memorable performance you have had so far?

One of my favorite gigs was subbing for my teacher, Benjamin Matthews, in Berkeley, Calif. in the early 2000s. This concert was held at the Calvin Simmons Auditorium and was a duet recital between star Hilda Harris and me. I had seen Ms. Harris over the years and her gracious and welcoming spirit was all the encouragement I needed to know I had reached a milestone in life as a performer. It was also my introduction to Four Season Arts, Inc. They are one of the last, if not the last concert promoter of their kind left in the country. They have invited me several times over the years to perform in the San Francisco/Berkeley area.

To whom do you reach for inspiration?

Of course, God is first in all things. Without a doubt, my mother has been the single greatest inspiration in my life. Following that, my teachers have given so much, in so many ways, that goes beyond description or definition.

More about Anthony Turner

Where he’s performed: I have always been of the opinion that where I sing is not as important as being able to sing where ever that place may be at that time. Thankfully I have seen most of the United States, Italy, Paris and Helsinki in my career. I believe that taking care of myself will bring even more opportunities my way.

The range of his singing voice: I am called a baritone on paper, but I happen to have a range that borders on tenor/baritone.

His current job: I am currently an adjunct professor of voice at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, New Studio on Broadway and Wagner College. I have private voice students and I perform.