



Dr. William B. Ray Sr.

April 10, 1925 - July 3, 2019

WILLIAM BENJAMIN RAY SR., the second of Mason Ray and Beatrice Smith's three children, was born on April 10, 1925 in Lexington, Kentucky. He transitioned from this life to eternal life on July 3, 2019.

Although William and his sisters, Nellie and Annabelle, grew up poor, they were nurtured by proud and loving parents. The house of his early childhood was simple, with gas lighting and an outhouse. William recalled that material things did not matter much because of the love and closeness of his family. The family of 5 grew to 6 when his father, Mason, brought home a puppy. William and his puppy "Rags" were inseparable. Rags knew his way to and from school and followed William to school then went home only to return to the school to wait for him on the corner as school let out.

When William entered Junior High School, the family moved to another house. This house had electricity and indoor plumbing. The house was near a grocery store too. William ran wherever he went unless he was with his parents.

William was educated in the Lexington public schools, and began singing at the age of six in the First Baptist Church of Lexington, Kentucky and continued to do so as he grew older. William graduated from Dunbar High School in 1943.

After High School, William was drafted into the United States Army. He served in the 37th Engr Gen. Serv. Regiment, receiving the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Excellent Marksman and other awards before being honorably discharged in 1946. Following his discharge from the Army, William William enrolled in Kentucky State College. He subsequently transferred to Oberlin College where he met the love of his life, Carrie Walls Kellogg. William graduated from Oberlin College Music Conservatory in 1949 and in the same year he and Carrie were married. William continued his voice training under the tutelage of Daniel Harris (of the Metropolitan Opera) while he set his sights on the big stage.

William's career in Opera has been stellar. It began in 1953 with performances at Karamu

Theater and his being a featured soloist with the DePaur Infantry Chorus. From 1954-1956, he was and Opera Singer at the Karamu Theater and Cleveland Playhouse in Cleveland, Ohio. William was discovered at Karamu House by an agent from Vienna, Austria while performing "Il Tabarro" by Puccini. As a result, he performed at the Vienna Opera House in the role of King Balthazar, in the production of Amahl and the Night Visitors.

Between 1957 and 1960, William performed as an Opera Singer in Frankfurt, Germany and other venues in Germany and Austria. After his European debut as Amonasro in "Aida" with Sir George Solti, he achieved star status as the leading baritone with Cuvillies Theater, Munich, Frankfurt Opera, among others.

From 1960 to 1978, William appeared as an actor and singer in 14 different roles in the German Language. During this time, William Ray continued voice coaching under Prof Sergei Radamsky in Florence and the Island of Elba, Italy. He recorded for a number of record labels, including DECCA, Intercord, Marcato, BBC & CBS. William also performed in East Berlin and Hungary. During these two decades William sang and recorded with Felicia Weathers, Collette Warren and others. Some of the duets are featured on his CD.

William Ray founded, in 1974, Black Theater Productions in Stuttgart, Germany and remained its president until 1985. The mission of Black Theater Productions was to open people's eyes to racial prejudice. The organization started producing sketches depicting typical everyday situations faced by blacks, such as not getting an apartment or not being served in a restaurant. Meanwhile Carrie wrote to television stations when negative stereotyping was depicted on TV. Together, William and Carrie worked on civil rights in the European community helping to pave the way for others to become successful overseas.

Although William toured Europe in concert throughout 1978 to 1982, he pursued additional education, obtaining his M.Ed from Boston University satellite Univ. Heidelberg, Germany in 1982. Having been recruited by The Peabody Conservatory of Music at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD to become Professor of Voice, William accepted the position and returned to the states. He and Carrie settled in Odenton and William soon joined Union Baptist Church, where he remained a faithful and active member. He remained at Peabody until 1992, when he retired. Retirement was short lived, however, because in the same year, William took a position at Howard University, which quickly became Head of the Voice Faculty. He retired from that position in 2000.

Other affiliations and activities for Professor William Ray:

- Adjudicator for the Baltimore Opera Company Competitions; Maryland Distinguished Scholar Talent in the Arts Competition; City of Baltimore Arts Council and most recently

The Annapolis Opera.

- Member of the National Association of Negro Musicians, the National Opera Association, Life member of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Life member of the NAACP, the Gamma Boule of the Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, and was elected into the Alpha Delta Chapter of Kappa Lambda National Music Honor Society.

Other awards and honors:

- Recipient of Gold Medal from the Lions Club of Italy.
- Exclusive USA representative for the Kaleidoscope Production Company, Munich, Germany.
- Listed in Who's Who in Photo, Film, and TV European Encyclopedia
- Berlin Opera Yearbook
- Who's Who in American Music
- Who's Who among Black Americans
- Blacks in Opera
- Black Americans in Cleveland, Ohio
- Cited as the only African-American International Opera Singer from the state of Kentucky.
- The Kentucky Commission on Human Rights inducted William Ray into the Kentucky Human Rights Hall of Fame.

The foregoing makes clear that William's life was one of extraordinary success, productivity and accomplishment. He did not, however, allow his success to go to his head. He remained humble and a well grounded individual. He never forgot from whence he came, the opportunities he had been given or those who or which made the opportunities possible. It is not surprising, therefore, that he founded Black Theater Productions and was an insistent and credible advocate for civil rights. Predictably, as well, William, remaining grateful for the opportunity it afforded, was a strong and consistent supporter of Oberlin. In addition, William was the interested and informed citizen, the consummate host, a candid and engaging conversationalist, a fast friend. He was, in short, a man worth knowing.

William Benjamin Ray, Sr. Leaves to cherish his memory and assure his legacy two sons, Alexander and daughter in-law, Jeryl, William Jr, two granddaughters, Jenna and Janine, by 11 nieces and nephews and their children as well as a host of friends and colleagues. He was preceded in death by his parents, his sisters, Nellie C. Taylor and Annabelle Carter, and his wife of 64 years, Carrie, who passed away in April of 2014.

Events

JUL **Viewing** 08:30AM - 08:00PM

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March Funeral Homes - West Baltimore

4300 Wabash Avenue, Baltimore, MD, US, 21215

JUL **Family Hour** 05:00PM - 07:00PM

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4300 Wabash Avenue, Baltimore, MD, US, 21215

JUL **Wake** 10:00AM - 11:00AM

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Union Baptist Church

1219 Druid Hill Avenue, Baltimore, MD, US

JUL **Service** 11:00AM

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Union Baptist Church

1219 Druid Hill Avenue, Baltimore, MD, US

Comments



“ Dr. Ray i will always remember you and ALL the conversation we have shared.

Dominique chandler - July 22 at 07:34 AM



“ Dr. Ray was a wonderfully supportive teacher, friend and mentor during my early years at the Peabody. Always attentive and kind, Mr. Ray's gentle and loving guidance (yes, even with his booming Bass/Baritone!) introduced me to the best that all Vocal Literature and singing has to offer. I will miss him and owe him so much for his everlasting encouragement of my talents. - Shari Rosen, BM Voice 1988, Peabody Conservatory of Music

Shari Rosen - July 15 at 12:11 PM



“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Dr. William B. Ray.



July 12 at 03:50 AM



“ We the March Family and Staff wish to extend our deepest and heartfelt sympathy in the passing of your loved one. Our prayers go out to you and your family in your time of loss. We know and understand that you have received many expressions of love and we will continue to lift you up in prayer. May the memories you cherish of brighter and happier days help to ease your sorrow and comfort you always.

March Funeral Homes - July 11 at 08:17 AM