



New Era Photo by James Gerberich

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March 18, 1982

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To Audiences Here for 25 Years



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Romayne Bridgett 'Returns Love' To Audiences Here for 25 Years

By **SAM TAYLOR**
New Era Staff Writer

She is probably one of the best-known women in the area, but Romayne Bridgett still reacts with surprise when people acknowledge her contribution to the cultural life of this community.

"I am really sincerely touched and humbled," she says. "I never stop to think about what I'm doing, and suddenly something like this comes up and it is a real thrill to discover that people actually approve."

This time, the "something like this" to which she alludes is a Saturday night testimonial dinner at the Brunswick Motor Inn planned in her honor by the Urban League Guild.

A 25-year career has steadily advanced the singer's reputation in local music circles.

Mrs. Bridgett has sung al-

most every type of music — opera, sacred, oratorio, musical comedy, orchestral soloist, and spiritual — in every conceivable location ranging from the stage of the Fulton Opera House to the choir loft of a tiny country church and the intimate air of an afternoon musicale. She has done it primarily because she "likes" doing it.

"About the only thing I haven't sung," she adds with a laugh in her rich contralto voice, "is country and rock and roll."

Her exposure to music has been a life-long experience which began in her native Mount Joy when she and her sister, Joan Lockwood, appeared together in Sunday school and church.

"She sang the soprano, and I was the alto even then," she says, "but I wasn't too interested in singing in those days because I began the study of the clarinet. It

was more fun to be in the orchestra and the band than it was to sing.

"Music and singing," she said, "are something we always just did in our family, and the first question my mother asked when she came home was 'Did you practice?'"

Romayne Skipper was married in 1950 to Sydney Neal Bridgett, a teacher. Shortly after the birth of the first of their three children, Sydney Jr., she began singing again.

"Being a mother and a housewife was fine," she said, "but I needed another outlet so I began taking singing lessons from Frederick Robinson, and I've been singing ever since."

Her first public appearance was in a Lancaster Opera

Romayne Bridgett

'Returns Love' to Her Audiences

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Workshop production of "The Medium," in which she played the role of Mrs. Nolan. Some years later when the LOW revived the vehicle she scored heavily as the medium.

How many public appearances has she made since that time?

"Oh heavens," she says, "I hadn't even thought about that and I never kept count — I think it would probably run into thousands over the last 25 years.

"At the beginning," she says, "I guess I was sort of a curiosity because I was a black woman, and I had a few odd experiences because of that.

"One time," she said, "I was appearing in a small county community. When I finished a woman came to me and asked where I was born and where I was from. I told her Mount Joy, and that I had been born there. She looked at me and then in a pure Pennsylvania Dutch accent asked, 'Chust what nationality are you anyway?' I told her I was an American."

She also remembers vividly the time in the earlier days of her career when a woman approached her and asked, "May I kiss you?"

"I asked her what on earth for. Her answer was one I'll never forget when she said "I've never kissed ONE before."

But, like the recognition and honors which are coming her way, Mrs. Bridgett is philosophical on the question of race and she's living proof that the philosophy is sound as a dollar.

"By now," she says, "I scarcely, if ever, run into the color question because I guess everybody knows who I am. I have always felt that if one does what is supposed to be done with grace and gives it the best shot possible, the barriers come down."

"People eventually find that I'm human," she adds. "I've always had tremendously good friends to whom color doesn't matter, and I have lived in places where it isn't even a consideration, and I know that most of the world doesn't think about color. It really doesn't bother me."

Mrs. Bridgett's big break for study abroad came when her husband accepted a civilian job with the United States Air Force in France, and she was able to study under two outstanding teachers who trained her voice and gave her an opportunity for performance.

During the six years that the Bridgett family lived abroad, she was the winner of the Arts and Letters Award for interpretation of Debussy, and the first prize in the International Vocal Competition of the Union of Women Artists and Musicians, both of them in Paris.

Since her return home she has been involved in every facet of musical activity, including a

term director of the choir at the Unitarian Church of Lancaster, president of Lancaster Opera Workshop, a performing member of the Musical Arts Society, and soloist with the Lancaster Symphony.

Then, too, she has made literally hundreds of guest appearances as soloist with choirs and choruses throughout the area.

"Last Christmas I sang four 'Messiahs' and gave several Christmas concerts which kept me busy almost every day of the holiday season," she says.

Another facet of Mrs. Bridgett's career is her position as one of the most sought-after vocal coaches and teachers in the area.

Working from an attractive studio at her home in Mount Joy, the 53-year-old contralto teaches a total of 64 vocal students a week.

"It is a six-day-a-week job," she says, "and often begins at 8 in the morning and doesn't end until 9 at night."

She has produced some singers who have made the big time, including Treat Williams, the star of "Pirates of Penzance" on Broadway who studied with her while a student at Franklin and Marshall College, and Bob Brubaker, currently a member of the New York City Opera Company.

In the wide range of repertory which she has covered in her career, what is her favorite role, and what would she like to repeat?

"There's a difference in what I like best, and what I think I've done best," she answers thoughtfully.

"The part I liked best was the contralto solo part in 'Oedipus Rex' at Franklin and Marshall College. The part I think I have done best was in 'The Medium.' I would also like to do the the Vaughn Williams 'Tudor Portraits' again. I did them about ten years ago at Georgetown University."

Is there something she would like to try which she's never been asked to do?

Her answer is strange because it has nothing to do with singing.

"Yes," she says, "I have always wanted to narrate the Aaron Copland 'Lincoln Portrait,' but nobody has ever asked me."

In order to make as many appearances as she has in the past, and as many as she plans in the future, she must have some approach to an audience and her reaction to a roomfull of people who have come to hear her sing.

"I feel that an audience is there because they want something from me. I want them to be satisfied. You can literally feel the love coming to you from them, and you return just as much of it as you can by doing your very best.

"I never fail to have a set of butterflies just before I go on