

Earnestine Rodgers Robinson

Earnestine Rodgers Robinson is a renowned composer whose illustrious song-writing career began with volunteering to assist with a simple church Easter program. "When I agreed to help, I was completely unaware of the hidden treasure that God had in store for me through my participation in this endeavor," Robinson said. But over a course of three decades, it blossomed into a prolific music career. Ms. Robinson has lectured extensively on how she became a composer of sacred classical music, though she has no formal training in music. She gave the convocation address to students at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota telling students to "...never give up on your dream if it is an honorable one, no matter how challenging the journey."

Born in Memphis, Ms. Robinson is the fifth of 11 children to Elder James and Euber Rodgers. As a child she was involved in many activities like serving as the citywide president of the Junior Red Cross for all the black high schools in the city. But none of her interests were directed toward writing music. In college, Earnestine studied mathematics as an undergraduate at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. But for family reasons she left Fisk and moved to Chicago and continued her studies at Northwestern University.

That is where she met and married Charles E. Robinson in 1960. She became a stay-at-home mom nurturing her brood of five children. Ms. Robinson eventually went on to receive a Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy from the University of Memphis and has done graduate studies in medical ethics, but still her music was the underlying current.

Everything changed in 1972, when she was asked to assist in preparing an Easter program for the church. "I stood in the bedroom of my home, reviewing the material for the program in preparation for the first rehearsal," Earnestine explained, "I opened the Bible to John 3:16, which I had intended to read, but instead, a melody flowed from my lips. I was stunned. As I attempted to read the next verse, the same thing happened, I sang the scripture. By now, I was simply ecstatic. I knew that if God had given me two verses of a song, He would surely give me the rest of the song." And she completed her first song, "For God So Loved The World," and a prolific song-writing career was begun.

In 1978, the composer and several of her works were presented on WMC-

TV, an NBC affiliate in Memphis. After that presentation, Earnestine's husband, Charles, was inspired to produce her first album, "Sounds of A Miracle." In 1980, the album received a glowing review in an article in Billboard Magazine, which also featured Ms. Robinson's unique style of composing music. Ms. Robinson, who composes several styles of music and was featured in Billboard Magazine in 1980 for her unique style of composing, says that she has a penchant for oratorios.

Her first oratorio, THE CRUCIFIXION, received the prestigious honor of being placed in the Library of Congress, and appears in public, academic, and special libraries across the country. Robinson and THE CRUCIFIXION, were the focus of a musical special, "A Woman and Her Music," that debuted nationally on PBS in 1995 and continues to air on PBS in cities across the country. THE CRUCIFIXION received its world premiere at Carnegie Hall, January 20, 1997. Excerpts from the performance and an interview with the composer were featured on CNN's "All About Women," and on Headline News.

THE NATIVITY, her most recent oratorio received its world premiere at Carnegie Hall November 25, 2001. An interview with the composer and excerpts from the Carnegie Hall performance were the featured Christmas story on NPR's "Morning Edition" with Bob Edwards. One year later in December 2002, THE NATIVITY had its European premiere in Prague where it was performed by the Czech National Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Paul Freeman.

Ms. Robinson was the subject of a documentary, entitled "Sounds of a Miracle" which screened at several film festivals, including the Palm Beach International Film Festival. In addition to inspiring audiences at two Academy-nominating festivals, the LA Shorts Fest and the Rhode Island International Film Festival, her story and music were featured in the documentary, "Hidden Treasure" that premiered at the prestigious Hoboken International Film Festival.

Currently, the composer is involved in a national radio tour, promoting her inspiring memoir, "Driven by Faith." Recognized as one of the world's toughest book critic, *Kirkus Reviews* in a glowing review stated the following about "Driven by Faith:"

"Rather than simply recount dry events, Robinson gives intimate, moving descriptions of her struggles and triumphs...the narrative sustains interest since the account is both sympathetic and unpredictable....Even though some describe the book as a faith journey, people of all beliefs, backgrounds, and religions may relate to the real life trials and tribulations.

Offers spiritual sustenance and tells the engaging life story of a barrier-breaking African- American composer.

Ms. Robinson lives in Memphis where four of her five children also reside. She has recently completed her newest oratorio, "Exodus," which will premiere at Carnegie Hall in February 2015.