



Marian Anderson: A SINGER'S JOURNEY

(Music in American Life)

Allan Keiler

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Marian Anderson was a woman with two disparate voices. The first - a powerful, majestic contralto spanning four octaves - catapulted her from Philadelphia poverty to international fame. A second, softer voice emanated from her mere presence: an unwavering refrain of opportunity and accomplishment in the face of racial prejudice. Anderson was born in 1897 to parents who made the long journey north from Virginia to escape the clutches of Jim Crow. Her musical genius was apparent from an early age, but even tremendous community and familial support could not shield her from the blows of economic hardship and bigotry she encountered in her early performing days. Anderson first garnered major acclaim while studying in London and Berlin. Her breakthrough in America commenced when impresario Sol Hurok took her under his wing, and her broad repertoire included Bach and Handel, spirituals, German lieder, French melodies, and the art songs of Scandinavian, Russian, and Spanish composers. In 1955, she became the first African-American to perform at the Metropolitan Opera. Since she was more comfortable as artist than activist, Anderson's intense privacy and devotion to her work distanced her from direct roles in the civil rights movement, but she remained a symbol of possibility throughout her career. Famously, Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from the Daughters of the American Revolution when the organization refused to let Anderson perform at Constitution Hall. Images of Anderson singing at the 1939 Easter concert, subsequently moved to the Lincoln Memorial, established her immediately as an icon in the struggle against discrimination. From meetings with Anderson before her death in 1993, as well as interviews, reviews, and early coverage in the black press, and personal diaries and letters, Allan Keiler has assembled a massive and magnificent study of Anderson's life. This first paperback edition features separate appendices for Anderson's repertory and discography, and thirty-two photographs of the singer's incredible life and career.

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