

About the Filmmakers and Cast

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. There 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.

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.

After several more years of ups and downs in her music-writing career, Ms. Robinson's perseverance and desire to share her gift with the world took her to the famed Carnegie Hall in New York.

Ms. Robinson's works are featured in the Special Collections of the Library of Congress and in libraries across the country. She lives in Memphis where four of her five children also reside.

Todd V. Robinson makes his directorial debut with the documentary film, *Sounds of a Miracle*. The eldest of Earnestine and Charles Robinson's five children, he was born in Chicago but grew up in Memphis, Tennessee.

He graduated as a Ralph J. Bunche scholar from Colby College in Waterville, Maine. But he continued his studies to pursue a medical career. He received a combined M.D. and Ph.D. in medicine and physiology/biophysics from the University of Tennessee Medical School. After a medical residency and a fellowship in endocrinology at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), he had a tour of duty as a flight surgeon in the U.S. Navy. He returned to Memphis where he became a faculty member at the VA Hospital and the University of Tennessee.

Todd's foray into film production is also intertwined with his mother's music career. He served as an executive producer of the family-produced documentary, "A Woman and Her Music," a performance documentary. He also produced a short film of Earnestine Rodgers Robinson's world premiere concert of "The Nativity" oratorio in Prague in 2003.

Todd currently practices Internal Medicine in Memphis where he lives with his wife, Bethany.

Gaius Robinson, the youngest child of Earnestine and Charles Robinson, followed in the footsteps of his grandfather. He is an ordained minister, serving as Associate Pastor at Evangel Temple Church and speaking at area homeless shelters in Memphis. He also took a career path that mirrors his father; he is an entrepreneur and runs an internet business called Dominion Marketing.

Gaius attended Tennessee State University and the University of Memphis. He applied his computer savvy skills toward his mother's music when they were preparing press kits to send to New York media before her concert at Carnegie Hall in 2001. He and his wife, Maria, have three children, Alexandria, Victoria and Isaiah.

Michelle Robinson McKissack has an extensive background in the broadcast industry. She has bachelor's and master's degrees from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University. For the last 10 years, Michelle has served as a television news anchor, reporter and program host in Memphis, Chicago, Peoria, Illinois and Washington, D.C. She has also taught journalism as an adjunct professor at Northwestern University and the University of Memphis.

Though Michelle's professional background is in broadcast journalism, her talents go beyond into the entertainment industry. She hosted and co-produced "A Woman and Her Music," a PBS-broadcast documentary about her mother, composer Earnestine Rodgers Robinson. She has performed dramatic narrations of her mother's oratorios, "The Crucifixion" at Carnegie Hall in 2001 and of "The Nativity" in Prague with the Czech National Symphony in 2002.

While working as a news anchor in Memphis, producer Michael Hausman saw her on TV and cast her as a reporter in the motion picture, "The People vs. Larry Flynt." She also played a reporter in the movie, "Cast Away."

Michelle is an avid community volunteer having served on several advisory boards including the Memphis Arts Council. Elite Memphis magazine named Michelle one of the 30 Most Beautiful People. She is married to John and they have three sons, John, James and Peter.

Craig Robinson left Memphis after high school to attend William Rainey Harper College in Illinois before transferring to Southern Illinois University in Carbondale Illinois.

His focus was in architectural engineering but he took a turn toward computers and returned to Memphis where he builds and repairs them while also working for UPS.

Craig is a silent supporter of his mother and her music, attending every concert possible from Portland, Oregon to Carnegie Hall in New York. The only one he missed is the concert in Prague. He stayed home in Memphis to care for his ailing father while the rest of the family traveled to support their mother.

Cheryle Robinson Jackson, who was born in Chicago and raised in Memphis, returned to the windy city to attend Northwestern University and get a bachelor's degree in Painting and Art Theory. But her professional career took a turn toward 'Corporate America' and she has been a groundbreaker in that arena.

She is the President and CEO of the Chicago Urban League, the first woman appointed to the position in the agency's 90-year history. Prior to this post, she served as the Deputy Chief of Staff for Communication for Gov. Rod Blagojevich of Illinois, the first woman and African-American to hold that position. Other career moves include working as Amtrak's national director of state government relations, and before moving to Chicago she served as a vice president at National Public Radio (NPR).

But Cheryle often says promoting her mother's music is her number one job. She co-produced the performance documentary, "A Woman and Her Music," which first aired on PBS nationally in 1995, designed the layout of the book, "The Crucifixion," and has assisted in various capacities in all of the performances of her mother's music.

Cheryle resides in Chicago with her husband, Charles.

Jonathan Griffith, Principal Guest Conductor of the New England Symphonic Ensemble, is a dynamic and charismatic conductor, lecturer and workshop facilitator. In addition to conducting the world premieres of Earnestine Rodgers Robinson's works at Carnegie Hall, Dr. Griffith has also conducted other premieres in his 40+ Carnegie Hall appearances.

For the past thirty years, Dr. Griffith has been actively teaching, lecturing, consulting and performing in the fields of voice, choral music and symphonic conducting.

Dr. Griffith has guest conducted for numerous orchestras and choruses including the Dvorak Chamber Orchestra, Czech Republic; Manhattan Philharmonic, New York; and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, Salt Lake City.

He has served as Chorus Master for the Utah Opera and the Portland Opera companies and currently is the Artistic Director for the Institute of Voice in Portland, Oregon.

A native of St. Louis, he received his B.M.E. from the University of Kansas, a M.M.E. from Wichita State University and his D.M.A. in conducting from the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Dr. Griffith holds residence in both Portland and New York.

Sharon E. Dobbins, an author, music critic and accomplished vocalist, has an extensive background in the study of voice and several musical instruments including piano, organ, oboe and violin.

Ms. Dobbins has contributed materials and writings to the Program in Black American Culture of The Smithsonian Institute. She has also written articles for Fortune Magazine, the Oberlin Review and the Tri-State Defender on classical music and music education.

She has performed with numerous chorales including Opera Memphis. As a performer, she was a featured soloist for Opera Memphis in its presentation of excerpts of Earnestine Rodgers Robinson's oratorio, "The Crucifixion."

A native of Washington, D.C., Ms. Dobbins has a Bachelor's degree in Music History and Voice from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, a M.M. in Vocal Pedagogy and Voice from the University of Memphis and post-graduate studies in Voice from the University of Memphis.