



Hamilton-Garrett



Celebrating 20 Years!

THE HG GAZETTE

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Official Newsletter of the Hamilton-Garrett Music and Arts Academy

Edited by Eva Montgomery-Morrison

Announcements and Updates

The Spring 2021 semester at HGMAA is now in full swing! Although our lessons and classes are still fully remote for the time being, our teachers and students are hard at work preparing for our end-of-year recital! For more on what our students have been working on this semester, see our write-up on page 4!



Photos by Anyelo Flores

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Thank You!

We would like to extend our most sincere gratitude to everyone who attended and gave their support at **Give Love: A Virtual Winter Fundraising Concert** on December 6th, 2020. Thanks to your donations, we were able to raise over **\$2,500** to help keep HGMA up and running! Special thanks to the **Boston Chapter of the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS)**, whose members were able to raise an additional **\$5,000** through their matching challenge.



A Conversation with Mrs. Elta Garrett

By Eva Montgomery-Morrison

Elta Garrett is the founding director and namesake of the Hamilton-Garrett Music and Arts Academy, along with the late Ruth Hamilton. In addition to her work at HGMAA, she also spent 40 years teaching music in the Boston Public School system as well as maintaining an active performing life. We talked to Mrs. Garrett in January about her long and illustrious life and career. Interview has been condensed and edited for clarity and brevity.



Mrs. Garrett with HGMAA students in 2018

Could you tell us a little bit about your musical upbringing as a child/young adult?

It started when I was a child; my grandmother was a music teacher. She went to what is now Dillard University, it was called New Orleans University. She majored in music, and they only had a two-year program at that time. Music played a big part in our home because my grandfather was an AME minister like Rev. Groover [Charles St. AME Pastor], and my grandmother was in charge of the music there. So I started singing at three years old, and it is still going on. I went to an elementary school that had a music teacher that would come in twice a month. Then, when I went to high school, they had an excellent music program there, so I spent ninth through twelfth grade in the music chorus. Then, when I went to Grambling State University, which was called Grambling College at the time, I participated in a talent show representing the town that I lived in; I sang "I Believe." When I got ready to come off the stage, I saw these teachers standing at the foot of the stage, and they said "young lady, we would like to talk to you!" And I'm saying "who are these people?" You know, a little freshman, scared to death. And they said "what do you plan to major in?" I said Pre-Med. They said "well, we would like for you to come over to the music building tomorrow and we would like to talk to you." I said that sounds strange, why am I talking to someone in the music department when I'm already set for pre-med? They asked me to study in their music program for one semester; if I didn't like it, I could use those courses as basic courses. So needless to say, I spent the rest of my life in music, and I went on to study music education with vocal music being my focus.

How did you first come to Boston?

Well, I was married at the time, and my husband was here working. So we decided that it would be easier for me to move here. I was teaching at a high school in Covington, Louisiana, and I felt that if I was ever going to break away from Louisiana, that would be a good time. So I moved here, and my first job was at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School. I stayed there three days, and at the time they were burning teachers' cars up, I said "this is not where I want to be!" Coming from the south where it was a totally different environment, as far as discipline, you know? They were doing too many bad things over there at the time. So I got hired at the James P. Timilty Middle School, and I stayed there for five and a half years, and then when Judge [W. Arthur] Garrity integrated the schools in Boston in 1974, I was sent over to the Frank V. Thompson Middle School. I stayed there 11 years, then I moved to the Woodrow Wilson in Dorchester, and I stayed there for one year. Then after one year, I moved to the Martin Luther King School, which I stayed at for 20 years until I retired in 2005.



A Conversation with Mrs. Elta Garrett

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Was there a point at which you realized that you wanted to do music professionally?

At Grambling, I got a chance to meet several opera stars; the school would invite them to come to our college to give concerts. In high school, you don't really put seriousness into what your real talent is. And they showed me at college, you're talented, and you have a great GPA, and we really think that that's your calling. And I stayed with it. They had all kinds of opportunities to travel; the chorus used to go on tour every year, and you had to audition every year even if you were already in the music department or in the chorus. I became first chair soprano my freshman year. So I stayed with it, and I got a chance to go to other countries to perform. President Kennedy had the USO, and he was looking for talent in mainly black colleges, and he chose Grambling to take a group we had there called the Mixed Notes. We went to San Juan, PR, even Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. We were singing mostly at army and navy bases. So that was quite an experience. While I was at Grambling, I had to do student teaching, and I did it at the college's lab school so I could practice for my recital. I didn't get a chance to go to other cities to do my student teaching because I had to practice for my recital. After I graduated in August 1963, we went overseas to perform. Then when I came back to the US, I came home to Bogalusa, Louisiana. My aunt was the principal of the school, so she had me come and work with the kids on different dances and programmatic stuff. You know, helping them get ready for Christmas and other performing venues. The day President Kennedy was assassinated, I got hired into the system. I was in the superintendent's office when the news came. I went to this little rural school, but it was the best thing that ever happened to me. They gave me a 6th grade class; I had to teach music, English, and science. So I did that, and I stayed there five years, but with integration I was moved to an all-white high school. I stayed there September through February, but my husband had come to Boston to go to school, so I moved here. And the rest is history, I was teaching music for the rest of my time until I retired.

What are your favorite types of music and artists?

The Negro Spirituals, and I have a couple of operatic pieces that I like. I still practice my operatic repertoire, but now it mostly includes spirituals. So I'm working on some of that now. I still like music, I like what they do at the Hamilton-Garrett, I love that! Now that my back has healed, I plan to spend a lot more time there when we go back.

Based on your time spent teaching, what changes or developments would you like to see in music education in public schools?

I would like to see more classical music in the public schools, and I would like for the Boston school system to reach back and get some of the music teachers that were teaching music with me, have us come in and help the new teachers--a lot of them would love to volunteer. The new teachers are just pushed out there; some know what to do, some don't. They're afraid, you know? And I don't want that for them. You've gone to college, you've gotten degrees, let us come in and not necessarily sit in your class, but just have discussions. We don't talk enough to our young teachers.



Highlights from HGMAA

Percussion lessons



"This semester I'm aiming to continue to refine the students' rhythmic reading skills while also stressing the importance of understanding melody and pitch. We will begin applying these skills to our percussion kits this semester (including snare drum/xylophone)."

-Mr. Tyson, percussion instructor

Violin lessons



"This semester we're working on:

1. Scales & Arpeggios in D, G, and C
2. "Air" by Joseph Bologne Chevalier de St. Georges (continuing working on this piece from last semester). Bologne was an African-European violinist, composer, conductor and expert fencer from the late 18th century (1745–1799), born in Guadeloupe and lived in Paris, France. This is an excerpt, arranged and adapted for beginning violin."

-Ms. Julie, violin instructor

Celebrating February Birthdays of Black Innovators



February is Black History Month, and we want to highlight a few of the many important figures in Black and American history who were born this month!

- February 4th: Rosa Parks, civil rights activist
- February 7th: Chris Rock, comedian and actor
- February 12th: Arsenio Hall, actor
- February 17th: Michael Jordan, basketball legend
- February 18th: Toni Morrison, author
- February 19th: Smokey Robinson, R&B singer
- February 20th: Rihanna, pop singer
- February 21st: Nina Simone, jazz singer
- February 23rd: W.E.B DuBois, sociologist and scholar