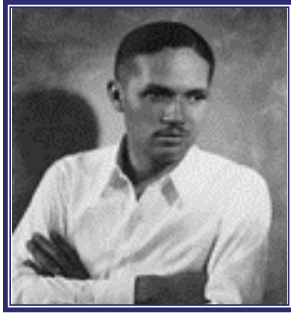


NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* TEACHERS *of* SINGING



TODD DUNCAN

THE TODD DUNCAN FUND

PROVIDES FUNDING FOR THE NATS ARTIST AWARDS

"A singer who has had a successful career has experienced that state of being which only a performer knows. It is the magical, sublime moment of ecstasy, creativity, or electricity that transcends voice, mind, and heart. Artist and audience glow and flow during that fleeting moment; neither will ever forget it. I try to challenge and goad my pupils to this plateau. Once in a great while I succeed." – Todd Duncan, *The NATS Bulletin Interviews, 1981 May/Jun (volume: 37 issue: 5 start page: 6)*

NATS member Todd "Duncan was George Gershwin's personal choice as the first performer of the role of Porgy in *Porgy and Bess* in 1935 and played the role more than 1,800 times. He led the cast during the Washington run of *Porgy and Bess* at the National Theatre in 1936, to protest the theatre's policy of segregation. Duncan stated that he "would never play in a theater which barred him from purchasing tickets to certain seats because of his race." Eventually management would give into the demands and allow for the first integrated performance at National Theatre. Duncan was also the first performer for the role of Stephen Kumalo in Kurt Weill's *Lost in the Stars*.

In 1938, Duncan appeared on the London stage at the Theatre Royal, Drury Land in C.B.Cochran's musical production *The Sun Never Sets*. The cast included fellow American Adelaide Hall, Leslie Banks, Edna Best and Steward Granger. The musical was adapted by Pat Wallace and Guy Bolton from various stories written by Edgar Wallace and the show included original music by Cole Porter. Duncan taught voice at Howard University in Washington, D.C. from 1930 until 1945. While teaching at Howard, he continued touring as a soloist with pianists William Duncan Allen and George Malloy. He had a very successful career as a concert singer with over 2,000 performances in 56 countries and two film roles. He retired from Howard and opened his own voice studio teaching privately and giving periodic recitals.

In 1945, he became the first African American to sing with a major opera company, and the first black person to sing in an opera with an otherwise white cast, when he performed the role of Tonio in Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* with the New York City Opera. In the same year he

sang the role of Escamillo, the bullfighter, in Bizet's *Carmen*. In 1954, Duncan was the first to record "Unchained Melody", a popular song with music by Alex North and lyrics by Hy Zaret. The recording was made for the soundtrack of the obscure prison film *Unchained*, in which Duncan also played a minor character. Following Duncan's version, the song went on to become one of the most recorded songs of the 20th century.

In his final interview, Todd Duncan spoke of his love for spirituals: "... spirituals are so deep inside of me, it's difficult for me to find words that are meaningful. Spirituals are a part of whatever I am. When I sing them my being sings them, not my throat.... It is very difficult for me to put into words something that is at the bottom of my very being."

In addition to singing, Duncan was a voice teacher. Among his notable pupils was operatic bass Philip Booth who was a mainstay at the Metropolitan Opera for two decades." – Source, Wikipedia

For more on Todd Duncan see this article from Randy Jones, author of "So You Want to Sing Spirituals" from the NATS "So You Want to Sing" Book Series. <https://afrovoices.com/todd-duncan-biography/>

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