

The Careys

Carol Brice and Thomas Carey are names which have appeared on programs from such prestigious opera houses as Covent Garden and the Vienna Volksoper.

Carol Brice Carey and Thomas Carey are names which appear monthly on the faculty payroll of the University of Oklahoma School of Music.

Together and separately, the Careys have few equals in their untiring efforts to encourage their voice students, their willingness to promote all the arts, their service to minority causes. On the campus, they are a team, but they couldn't be more different.

Carol is a Congregational minister's daughter who grew up in the rural South. She didn't experience integration until she was a scholarship student at the Juilliard Graduate School of Music in New York City. When she sings spirituals, she sings with the bone-deep memory of the ladies' "amen" corner in the small churches she knew as a child.

Tom has a Catholic background and grew up in a Brooklyn neighborhood which was a mosaic of colors and cultures. Discrimination was un-

known in his childhood. He sings, and teaches his students to sing, spirituals as art songs, with an academic attention to the notes on the paper.

Carol keeps everything. Many of her photographs and all of her papers are in the Armistead Research Center in New Orleans, Louisiana, which is the world's largest depository of primary source material on Afro-American history. But she still has a wall full of photos in her studio in OU's Carpenter Hall. Tom throws everything away. The walls of his studio, just across the hall from Carol's, hold few remembrances of his performances. He even was going to throw away his performance programs when it occurred to him to make the decoupage screen which faces his piano.

Carol was an early bloomer. Tom never believed he would be able to make a living by singing.

"I still think I have a mediocre voice," Tom confesses. "Carol and I argue about that all the time."

"His voice has a unique quality with a unique impact," Carol insists. "He doesn't have to have a big voice."

No one ever accused Carol of lacking a big voice. The sound starts at the tip of her toes, welling up and out until the listener is engulfed by a deep, dark mass of melody.

The quality of Carol's voice was drawing comments by the time she was three years old. She won a trophy as the best contralto in the state at the age of 13. As a member of the Sedalia Singers of Palmer Institute, she toured throughout the South and had appeared at Town Hall in New York City by the time she was a teenager.

Carol was educated at Palmer Memorial Institute, a unique co-educational facility and finishing school for young blacks, located in Sedalia, North Carolina. The institute was founded by her aunt, Charlotte Hawkins Brown.

"My aunt was a contemporary and

By PAULA BAKER



Audiences first heard Tom Carey as Porgy and Carol Brice as Maria in a 1968 production of "Porgy and Bess," the show that has become their personal property.

close friend of Mary McLeod Bethune," Carol says, "although she is not as well known because she was not as politically involved as Bethune, who was identified with the Roosevelt administration."

Carol, the youngest of four children, comes from a distinguished family. Brother Jonathan, an accomplished pianist, often was her accompanist, and with brother Eugene, a

bass-baritone, they formed the Brice Trio. A sister, Lolita, who died three years ago, was the mother of the first black astronaut, Guion Bluford, Jr., who is scheduled for space flight in 1983.

"Sedalia was nothing but a store with a post office in back and the institute across the street," Carol recalls. "My mother taught history, and my father was vice president and

chaplain of the institute. We used to go around to the black churches in the countryside with him. Usually, he just would be asked to give a prayer — his sermons would have been over the heads of those congregations. I can still hear the sounds ringing out from the ladies' 'amen' corner — and the churches, which were usually set up on concrete blocks, would be rocking."

After graduating in 1939 from Taladega College (which later awarded her an honorary doctorate), Carol joined her mother and Jonathan in New York City. Her scholarship to Juilliard Graduate School of Music was renewed for five years. During the summer of 1939, she sang in the chorus of "The Hot Mikado" at the New York World's Fair and met Cornelius Wiley "Neil" Scott. They were married from 1942 until his death in 1967. The Scott children, Cornelius, Jr., and Lisa Ellen (Greer) are each married now and are the parents of five children who delight Tom and Carol.

The oldest grandchild, "Chappy" Scott, spent a year with the Careys in Norman and appeared in the Music Theater production of "Amahl and the Night Visitors." During his stay, Chappy was Tom's most influential ally in convincing Carol to continue to vocalize and perform.

Carol admits that she was ready to "slack off" as a performer by the time she met Tom in 1968. Widowed for a year with her son gone from home and her daughter a teenager, she felt she had concluded one life and was ready to devote herself to teaching.

She had been in the public eye since her operatic debut in "The Chaplet" at the Museum of Modern Art in 1942. Hailed as a "second Marian Anderson," she was the first black to sing with the Yale Glee Club and the first black to win the Walter H. Naumberg Foundation Prize in 1944. (In 1975, she was the only vocalist invited to appear in the Naumberg 50th anniversary concert.)

The Naumberg Prize opened the door to a series of symphony engagements — including the Pittsburgh Symphony, the Berlin Philharmonic and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Carol still regards Serge Koussevitsky of Boston as her mentor —

**“Then they announced,
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and-such country—
and Thomas Carey
of America.’ ”**

she caught his attention at the time he was promoting the young Leonard Bernstein.

Carol signed with the New York City Opera company in 1959, making her debut as Addie in Marc Blitzstein’s “Regina” (based on “The Little Foxes”). Other New York City roles included Clarence Cameron White’s “Ouanga,” “The Grass Harp,” (her only starring role on Broadway) and “Porgy and Bess.” She appeared in several productions of “Porgy and Bess” in the 1960s, singing with William Warfield as Porgy and Cab Calloway, for whom the part of Sportin’ Life was written.

Carol Brice became synonymous with the role of Maria, the matriarch of Catfish Row, performing it more than 3,300 times. When the Houston Grand Opera mounted its highly acclaimed, true-to-Gershwin production in 1976, Carol was an obvious choice for the cast. She won a Grammy plaque for her part in what was cited by the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences as the best opera recording of the year.

While Carol was making a name for herself, Tom was still finishing his education. Carol admits, with a trace of coyness, that she is “a little bit” older than Tom.

“I was brought up in a poor neighborhood in Brooklyn where everyone was ethnic,” Tom recalls. “My mother was against kids working, but I got a job with Nick the iceman when I was 10 years old. I carried ice in a croker sack (burlap bag) up five to ten flights of stairs. My lungs started to develop, and I got to know the entire neighborhood and get this warm feeling for all kinds of people. I never knew discrimination until I was in the Army, but sometimes I feel that I missed out on Carol’s experiences with the black churches. We often talk about what she had to adjust to when she moved North.

“I studied business and advertising at New York City College and took music as a hobby at Henry Street Music School,” Tom continues. “I got chorus jobs and small parts on Broadway, but I didn’t know if I had enough talent to make a living singing. Then I got a John Hay Whitney grant to study in Germany.”

Tom studied music and languages in Stuttgart and Munich and began entering music competitions.

“For the first two years of competition, I didn’t get anything but the joy of being part of the festivities,” he says. “Then, one year in the Munich Competition, they announced ‘so-and-so of such-and-such country and Thomas Carey of America.’ I got goose pimples, just to think I was representing America. Even now, when I sing ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’ at OU basketball games, I get goosebumps.”

The goosebumps are contagious, according to those who have been in the Lloyd Noble Center when the whole crowd of noisy fans is thrilled into quiet by Tom’s a cappella rendition of the national anthem.

“I was in the Munich finals,” Tom continues, “and the competition song was announced — ‘Wehmut’ by Robert Schumann.”

He pauses and Carol interjects, “He’s like a rabbit in a briar patch with a song like ‘Wehmut,’” explaining that the selection was one of the German art songs that are Tom’s specialty.

Tom was indeed a “rabbit in a briar patch” with “Wehmut.” He began winning competitions, among them the Queen Elisabeth Song Award in Belgium, the Bavarian Singing Award of Munich and the opera award of Amsterdam, Holland. Professional engagements all over Europe followed, including the roles of Rigoletto, Germont in “La Traviata” and Pagageno in “The Magic Flute.”

Although a career in Europe was opening up, Tom began thinking about returning home. He hadn’t felt comfortable in Germany. He believed people were staring at him because he was black. Once he called home and told his mother he couldn’t take it anymore.

“Mother said, ‘You didn’t go there



When Tom Carey sings the national anthem, you can hear a pin drop.

to love it, or because it would be easy,” Tom recalls. “She asked, ‘Did you ever think they were staring because you’re cute?’” Carol smiles at that, as if the thought had struck her too.

Tom was already a self-styled “No. 1 Fan” of Carol Brice’s sold-out Town Hall concerts when they were introduced by a mutual friend prior to appearing in “Porgy and Bess” for a U.S. State Department tour of France.



Carol Brice and Karen Morrow got good reviews.

They sang throughout France and were feted at a reception in Nice attended by Carol's friend, Princess Grace of Monaco. Carol and the former Grace Kelly had had the same voice teacher when the latter was preparing for the movie "High Society."

Since their tour in 1968 and marriage in December 1969, "Porgy and Bess" has been identified with Tom and Carol. They have sung it with the Lisbon (Portugal) Opera Company, the Los Angeles Civic Light Opera and in a concert version with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra.

In December 1981, they brought their acclaimed roles to their adopted state in a complete concert performance with the Oklahoma Symphony Orchestra. Calloway appeared as Sportin' Life and other soloists were selected by auditions. The Careys were elated that some OU students were selected for supporting roles and that the OU choir formed the nucleus of the symphony chorus, rehearsed by Dennis Shrock, the director of OU choral activities.

"Porgy and Bess" is the Careys' shared show, but Tom has his own vehicle — "Show Boat." "Ol' Man River" has flooded his vocal chords to



on Broadway. "The Grass Harp" didn't.



Carol as Maria rehearses with the original Sportin' Life, Cab Calloway, for the 1981 concert version of "Porgy and Bess" with the Oklahoma symphony.

the point that it practically takes an Act of Congress to coax it out one more time. In fact, only the presence of a former president and present and past speakers of the U.S. House of Representatives persuaded Tom to sing it at the founding banquet for OU's Carl Albert Research Center.

During his London performances as Joe in "Showboat," Tom met British singer Cleo Laine. Their friendship brought Laine to OU's Rupel J. Jones Theatre to make her American concert hall debut as a benefit for the OU Chamber Choir — some weeks before she sang for the critics in New York City. Although Laine and her jazz musician husband John Dankworth now are selling out performances in the Hollywood Bowl and Carnegie Hall, they have returned to Oklahoma four times.

Their last two appearances, in Lloyd Noble Center and Oklahoma City's Civic Center Music Hall, have benefited the Cimarron Circuit Opera Company, which Carol and Tom founded in 1975 to give more performing opportunities to students. The company, which now includes graduates both in and out of the music profession, also gives many Oklahomans their only chance to experience live opera performances through the Careys' "no town is too small or too far" philosophy.

Tom, who still was based in Europe, had had no intention of joining the OU faculty when he first interviewed for the position of visiting professor of voice.

"An American friend, Jack (John) Gillas, had joined the OU faculty, and he asked me to come for an interview," Tom recalls. "I wasn't even thinking about teaching, but I was interested in coming home. When I made my Town Hall debut in New York in 1968, I came on to Oklahoma.

"C. M. Stookey, who was director of the music school at that time, met me at the airport. The weather was nice, and everyone was so friendly. People treated me with respect — as if they really wanted me to come. I already had contracts all over Europe that year, but I was told that I could reschedule my lessons around these previous commitments."

Tom became a visiting professor of music in September 1969, with the understanding that he would perform baritone roles in a newly formed faculty opera company. Memorable OU productions of "La Traviata" and "Falstaff" followed before the music theater program returned to a student-star format, with the notable exception of the 1977 version of "Hello, Dolly," starring both the Careys.

When Carol and Tom were married in December 1969, the University nepotism rule prevented couples from teaching in the same department. Tom commuted to New York every other weekend, while Carol continued to teach in New York City public schools and accept professional engagements. Among them were roles in the Vienna Volksoper productions of "Porgy and Bess," "Showboat" and

"Carousel." Carol first began teaching at OU on a no-pay basis, covering Tom's classes while he fulfilled singing engagements, such as his Covent Garden debut in London, when he created the leading role in Sir Michael Tippett's "The Knot Garden."

Carol was appointed a visiting professor and Tom an associate professor in 1971 but the lack of a tenure track for both had convinced them to accept a joint offer from the University of Ohio. B. A. Nugent, who became director of the OU School of Music following Stookey's death, got wind of this development and was able to work out a solution to the appointment/tenure problem for both Careys.

Tom is also a regular church soloist for special services on Christmas Eve and Easter morning, following in the footsteps of the late Joseph Benton, the opera singer-turned-teacher who formerly occupied Tom's position on the faculty. The Careys became good friends with Benton, taking him home for dinner after Sunday church services. They encouraged Benton to continue working with students on an informal basis long after his retirement, and they still cherish their signed photos of Benton from his days as the international opera star "Giuseppe Bentonelli."

The Presbyterian Church has reciprocated by providing a home base and other means of support for the Cimarron Circuit Opera Company

phony Board. Carol was on the board for the first Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute.

For their efforts, the Careys were named Musicians of the Year by the Oklahoma Federation of Music Clubs in 1976. Tom was in the first group to receive Governor's Arts Awards in 1976, and Carol received one in the fall of 1981.

However, they differ in their response to other committee invitations. Carol is eager to give time in areas which relate to music and other special interests. She is a faithful member of the University graduate committee and the equal employment opportunity committee. However, she is still amazed at being asked to monitor obscenity for the OU film review board.

"Why they thought I was qualified to judge 'Pink Flamingoes,' I'll never know," she marvels, but Tom insists that "an artist should be able to judge artistic merit, no matter what."

Tom enjoys being on committees which have nothing to do with his teaching, but one fine arts committee is close to his heart. As a member of the bachelor of fine arts committee, he pushed for the establishment of a major in fine arts, with emphasis in music, art or drama, without the unequivocal commitment required by a major in a single specialty.

"I am sorry they didn't have a bachelor of fine arts when I was in college," he says. "Perhaps I would have finished a degree."

"I wish he had gotten that business degree," Carol interjects. "Maybe he could do our income tax now."

Tom is also a member of the board of directors of the American Exchange Bank and an enthusiastic member of the Lions Club — but without the fellowship opportunities the club's weekly luncheons provide. Both the Careys teach classes right through lunchtime. "We eat a big breakfast and a big dinner and go all day," Carol explains. "With our dimensions, we don't need anything more."

Since the Careys' arrival in Norman, they have known a succession of OU presidents and music school directors. Now, with William Banowsky as president and Allan Ross as director of the School of



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Carol, dressed for the Cimarron Circuit Opera's "Hansel and Gretel," demonstrates opera techniques for fourth graders as part of an arts enrichment program.

Once the commuting was over, the Careys settled into church and civic life in Norman. They both became active in the First Presbyterian Church as trustees and deacons, preferring work that "deals with people." Carol not only contributed her musical expertise to the worship committee — she took out her autoharp and got down to eye level with the small fry at family-oriented services for choruses of rollicking "Mr. Rabbit." She also rolled up her sleeves and went into the kitchen with other deacons when a new supply of communion wafers was needed. Carol organized programs for retired women at the church's Kirkpatrick Manor. Tom is continuing them.

and by serving as one of four Norman churches that alternate as sites for the Palm Sunday Festival of Spirituals, which the Careys inaugurated 13 years ago.

The Careys don't confine their volunteer work to their church, however.

"If you are for the arts, you should be for them in every aspect," Carol says. "Whenever the arts need a boost, we feel we should pitch in."

When the Oklahoma Symphony was threatened, the Careys took an active role in the HOSS (Help Our Symphony Survive) campaign. Tom was a member of the Oklahoma Arts Council until his mandatory retirement after six years of service. He is currently on the Oklahoma Sym-

Music, they are excited about the plans for a new music building.

"We are both very pleased with Dr. Banowsky as president and his commitment to excellence," Tom says. "The Benton-Schmidt Voice Scholarships, which range from \$1,000 to \$2,000, are large enough to attract top students nationally. We are looking forward to getting students who are gung-ho performers."

The Careys are united in their love for teaching and their determination to provide inspiration and opportunities for their students to "go for it." A shared frustration is the discovery of singers with great potential who set their career sights too low. They grieve over voices lost because the students have settled for non-musical or insufficiently demanding careers.

"However," Carol admits, "it's a long, hard climb. Students must love performing so much that they can't stand to do anything else."

The move from college to professional work is the most difficult of all, and much depends on luck, Carol says, but she quickly adds that "luck is when you are prepared to meet your opportunities."

The Careys are determined to provide this type of preparation at OU. They have not hesitated to innovate programs to help luck happen. They are constantly prodding their students to enter competitions and auditions to prepare for the fiercely competitive world of professional singing.

Their Cimarron Circuit Opera Company not only provides more experience with live audiences, it also raises scholarship funds for concentrated opera training such as those available at Inspiration Point, Arkansas, and the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria. The latter is a kind of operatic finishing school founded by Dallas opera singer Richard Owens. Both Careys have been on the faculty at Graz in the past, and they will return this summer. Tom also will perform.

"I don't think I have given up anything by taking on a teaching career," Tom says. "I used to accept engagements that didn't really interest me. I hated — and still hate — to fly. I think I am singing better than ever, but now I can sing in European sum-



Although Thomas and Carol Brice Carey do not always appear together, many of their most memorable appearances have been team efforts, such as the 1977 OU Music Theatre's "Hello, Dolly," starring the Careys with a student cast.

mer festivals and just fly one round trip. And I love teaching. In another five years, I think people will begin to hear from our students."

The road to professional competence is long and hard, but the Careys already have a few students who, like Porgy, "are on their way." They cite Jan Leeds, who has signed a contract for her second season at Wolf Trap in Vienna, Virginia; Ron Ross, who is an apprentice in the Houston Opera program, and Patricia McGlothlin, who

was a finalist in the prestigious Pavarotti competition.

The Careys already have made the trip from student to professional performer in the major concert halls of Europe and the United States. They have arrived and have taken one step beyond — into teaching.

"It's so comfortable being in Norman. We have decided to make it our home," and the dissimilar couple speaks with one voice and a heart-felt "amen." 