

7-6-2018

Glenda Kirkland, July 6, 2018

Matt Jones

Alexis Braun Marks

Eastern Michigan University Archives, Oral Histories

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Oral History Interview with Glenda Kirkland (GK)

Conducted by Historic Preservation Graduate Student Matt Jones, (MJ) and University Archivist Alexis Braun Marks, (ABM)

Transcribed by Historic Preservation Graduate Student Rachel Burns

Recorded 2018 July 6th at Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan

MJ: It's June 26th 2018 and this is Matt Jones. I'm a grad student at EMU and I'm here along with University Archivist Alexis Braun Marks. Today, we are in Southfield at the home of Glenda Kirkland, vocal instructor with the EMU department of music from 1972 until 2009. Kirkland taught many courses in music at EMU and served as the director of the EMU Opera Workshop. She has also given out many lectures and recitals with various opera companies and guest performed with luminaries such as William Warfield, Gwyneth Jones, and Luciano Pavarotti. She's been universally praised for her interpretive skills, her charisma, her perfect breath control and deep respect for the text's open-hearted naiveté. Can you give us a little bit of your personal background pre EMU? Where you came from a little about your family and schooling?

GK: Born in Dublin Georgia in the- grow up in the forties fifties. That was Jim Crow Era. My mom took to me college with her, she was a single mom. She was in the choir at her college Fort Valley State College in Georgia. She tells the story that I would sit in the back of the auditorium and sing along with the choir and her best friend said "Mary, you have something about this girl can sing." That's all she had to say to my mother who was very outgoing. She encouraged me to do everything in music that she possibly could. Made me take piano lessons from Mr. Johnson who came to our house once a week and unfortunately I did not like Mr. Johnson or those piano lessons, so I would hide from him when he showed up. Then later on when I got to EMU I thought "I shouldn't have hid from that piano teacher. I needed those piano lessons." But anyway. I grew in Dublin. We moved to Atlanta where I went to high school and then college, Spelman college. When I was a senior in high school I won a contest to sing **Mi Calazaria** with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. That was special and that got the college's attention to me. They gave me scholarships, the local colleges. So I went to Spelman on scholarship.

MJ: What didn't you like about taking piano lessons?

GK: Mr. Johnson

MJ: Just him?

GK: He was sort of an elderly gentleman and very strict and was not encouraging at all as I remember. It was probably I didn't practice the way I should have. But I eventually did like taking piano lessons and I learned to play the piano somewhat. Later on in life, I did more singing than playing and that was my forte-singing.

MJ: It seems like a lot piano students, they are not playing what they want to play so they drop off. That's how I was anyway.

GK: Really?

MJ: But then they started letting me do what I wanted, and I loved it. In a press release from 1981 you said you got into singing because it was the only thing you were good at.

GK: Well that's what I felt like. And it's probably true. My students would tell you I did not play the piano well, but I tried to play for them. Some of them did appreciate that. I played fairly well. Singing was my forte, always.

MJ: You also said you got into it because it was not a common thing for a female black singer to do.

GK: It wasn't. In fact, when I was at Spelman College, the college sent me to a voice teacher outside of the school because our choir teacher unfortunately passed my senior year. They gave me piano lessons to a wonderful lady who lived in the city and she prepared to audition for the Juilliard school which I did. I did get in. That was a hard thing to do. They were tough, well you know the reputation. But I had to show them recital, my senior recital and perform some of the repertoire from that recital. Now, don't ask me what it was, I just remember singing here "Here Ye Israel" from Elijah very well, I did. They were floored by that. They didn't believe that I could sing that and I did. So, I think that helped me get into Juilliard, but also sang an art song can't remember it now. Did some art songs in German, French, Italian.

MJ: Was there a style of music that female black singers were pursuing more than?

GK: I don't know. When I was in high school we had a little group that performed like The Supremes. The main thing about that was we had cute dresses, and we could sing, but we had to have the right attire. We won contest around the city. We had a lead singer that could sound just like Aretha Franklin. I was the backup singer, I did not sing the lead. But it was fun, those were the fun days in high school.

MJ: Backup singing's not supposed to be easy, is it?

GK: No it's not easy.

MJ: It seems almost as difficult as singing lead cause you have to match the person singing lead.

GK: Yes and you have to come in on time, now the music, know his or her part and your part. That's true for any music, operatic music as well. If you're going to be a good opera singer, you better know the leads solo.

MJ: Is it more common now to see black opera singers?

GK: There are more yes. But we can almost name them on one or two hands, I think. What impresses is the quality of singing nowadays, outstanding vocalists. I've judged contests and I've just been floored by the talent we draw to those contests.

MJ: Did you see that change overtime? The talent level rise while you were teaching?

GK: I did, especially at EMU. They seemed to be drawn to teachers not necessarily to the program but to a teacher who was there. We had some wonderful talent to come through EMU. Most of our singers were music teachers, music educators. A lot of them perform with Michigan Opera Theater. They sing small parts and chorus. And we had some- I had one girl go to Europe to sing professionally. Now she's singing in Europe. There's some success stories from EMU. Our problem was we were close to the University of Michigan.

MJ: That seems like a recurring-

GK: Anytime we would have a famous performer to come to EMU, they first wanted to go to UM and of course, knocked our publicity down a little bit. But we worked at it and we tried. I invited Elly Ameling, wonderful soprano, I don't know if you heard of her. Wonderful soprano. I was surprised we could afford her. She came for a workshop but UM advertised for her and the advertisement came through UM instead EMU "she will be at the UM blah blah blah" so we had to compete with that.

MJ: I'm going to come back about to that in a little bit because I want know more about it. You said in a press release that you didn't get serious about singing until you went to Juilliard. And that seems strange to me because you have to be serious to get into Juilliard.

GK: I had good mentors and teachers and it came easy. Singing was easy to me so, I just did it. Whatever they told me to do, I did and it got attention. Juilliard was so competitive and everyone there was the best person from their local area. The best- so I felt like "my goodness, what I am doing here?" But I ended performing quite a bit. I enjoyed it when I look back on it I really did enjoyed it.

MJ: Even with the all the distance you mentioned?

GK: I made some close friends. I had three or four people that I still talk to who came from Juilliard.

MJ: When you started teaching, did you try to stray away that distant atmosphere? Did you bring anything from Juilliard into your teaching career?

GK: Oh, everything I did, I'm sure. A culmination of everything I knew, I taught to my students. At that time, they seemed to appreciate it very much, so we had a good relationship, I think my requirements were a little higher than some of the teachers, maybe one or two had the same requirements, but I had a lot of winners in this area for the National Association Teachers of Singing-NATS. EMU actually had first place almost every contest we beat out the U of M quite often.

MJ: Good (laughter).

GK: It was that kind of atmosphere, but I brought to the students everything I knew and that's what I told them I would do. I said "this is what I know and this is what I'll teach you."

MJ: I think that a little later in the conversation there's another quote of you talking about how teaching students to actually love the music is as important as performing the music. That seems like it would rare sometimes. Was that followed at Juilliard too? Or was that more of a performance based-was it more about chops at Juilliard or did they teach to love what you were doing?

GK: I don't think they consciously taught us to love it, but we ended up loving it because we had to work so hard. So you love what you do, it was competitive. You don't think about loving it when you are competing but I taught the students to love the music the best I could.

MJ: Well when people either love or hate opera-this is you again. There is no middle ground. But they don't know much about it and they tend to shy away from something they don't know much about it that's something you said and I was wondering how much of your teaching was directing-like how much of your teaching time was devoted to teaching people about what they were singing instead of how to sing it? And how did you do that?

GK: Well you have to. You have to talk about the literature, the poem, the composer. I would require them to know the history of the song they were singing of the repertoire. It was an assignment to research and know the poem, interpret the poem, know the text.

MJ: And you taught one on one?

GK: Yes, I did

MJ: So you would give them assignments. Did every instructor do the same thing?

GK: No.

MJ: Everyone didn't hold that as important to know about the song?

GK: There was a basic requirement. Certain number of songs, certain types of song at each level-freshman, sophomore, junior, senior. There were certain requirements and we all held to that.

MJ: Why did you come to EMU to get your masters?

GK: Well, the summer I was going to get married, my mother required that I find a university in this area to complete my master's degree. Because I started at Juilliard and she said "you should complete this masters in this area." So I started looking at schools, I went to Oakland University actually. I didn't contact Wayne. I did contact U of M and I had an appointment with Willis Patterson. For some reason I didn't connect with that and then I did contact EMU and the person there was Dr. James -Laurence James. He insisted that I come up that day to interview with him because he was making decision. (Imitating) "If you want to come here, you better get here now." So I found a way to get to EMU that day or the next day and I sang for him and he started to pull all of the faculty that were in their offices to come listen to this girl sing. So I thought "okay this is interesting." He offered me a graduate assistantship that day. I said "well okay, I don't have anything else to do." My mom was really on me to get this masters, so let's do it.

MJ: Dr. James was it James Hoff?

GK: Jim Hause was the departmental director. Dr. Willis Laurence James was the vocal area director. Wait a minute. I'm getting my places mixed up. Dr. James was at Spelman College. I apologize. Dr. Henry was my vocal area chair when I came there.

MJ: What was your impression of him, Oscar Henry?

GK: He was my voice teacher. He was tough.

MJ: Was he tough on everyone?

GK: He was tough on everyone. He had a temper, but he all dealt with it. He did some really good things for EMU while he was there. He established a music office where a person donated money for the school so that we could establish a file of music for students. A lot of his students went on to perform quite well.

MJ: What kinds of things would make him lose his temper?

GK: You want gossip, don't you?

MJ: You don't have to tell.

GK: Okay, I won't.

MJ: Did you have any other association EMU before you came here?

GK: No.

MJ: What were your first impression when you came?

GK: Well, when I went to the first aria, they called it aria recital, where all students performed every Monday at four o' clock. I was shocked because coming from Juilliard where every singer was the best singer in the world, I was sort of shocked to hear the singers at EMU who were like music education majors and wonderful people. Really nice, but not as talented as I had been accustomed to hear. I hope that's not a bad thing to say.

MJ: No I don't think so, I mean it is Juilliard.

GK: But then we did wonderful things, amazing things we had with the talent at EMU. Really did. I'm a good example of that.

MJ: Do you remember any other influential instructors that you worked with?

GK: At EMU?

MJ: Mhmm. That you studied under?

GK: Just give me a minute to think, I know that there are several. Well of course, I loved Joe Gurt, he also went to Juilliard. I didn't work with him but we performed together a couple of times I think. I sang in the choir under Blaine Ballard, don't know if you've seen his choirs. He did a very good job. I loved everybody. I got along with all of them.

MJ: What was the atmosphere in the music department? Was it pretty tight knit? Was it amongst instructors when you started teaching?

GK: It was sort of tight knit.

MJ: Because something that has been carried over from a lot interviews we've done was how that sort of familial atmosphere at Eastern has changed over the years and kind of not as tightly knitted as before. We've been trying to figure out why.

GK: That's too bad.

MJ: So it was very close?

GK: We used have lunch together and have working lunches over in McKenney, and had aria meetings.

MJ: I've read a little about Joseph Gurt and especially him accompany you and also Edward Szabo too. What kind of people were they? I can reach out to them

GK: They're great people. Easy to talk to ,Joe Gurt especially.

MJ: Easy to play with? Easy to sing with?

GK: Mmhhh. Dr. Szabo was the orchestra director when I was there. We performed a couple of arias with the orchestra under his direction.

MJ: And you worked with Russell Reed a couple of times?

GK: Oh yes, I loved Russ Reed. We had fun together.

MJ: Why was he so fun? I've heard that from other people too.

GK: He was open and encouraging, willing to try anything, let the performers do their thing and just very talented, kind person.

MJ: Do you remember the hiring process? Did anyone lobby for your hiring on as an instructor?

GK: Lobby? I wouldn't know about that.

MJ: What was the hiring process like?

GK: Well there were interviews. We had to submit an application and then if you were asked to interview, you would come into interview.

MJ: Did you have to audition or anything like?

GK: Yes, auditioning was a part of that.

MJ: Do you have any idea how many auditions you've done in your life.

GK: (laughs) That would be a hard one.

MJ: Was that ever apart of your teaching?

GK: You know, singers have to audition all of the time. Even if you have a good reputation, you have to audition.

MJ: Would you ever try to help students with the audition process? Was that apart of teaching?

GK: Oh, absolutely. Especially, we taught that when they would sing at NATS, they had to audition- how to introduce themselves and the repertoire they were singing. Then perform with as though you have a room full of people with you. Even if you had just one person in your audience you give your best all the time. That's what I did and that's what I taught my students to do.

MJ: Is there something you would teach your students to do before they performed for a large audience? Is there some sort of routine before you went on stage?

GK: We practiced in the area where you would be performing. We practice and have a dress rehearsal. So they would practice walking on stage and walking off before and after each piece of music. Sometimes I would applaud in between to throw them off and they still remained dignified and controlled, remembering what they were up there for. So we tried to prepare as best we could and we did a pretty good job of it with most of the students.

MJ: When you came to EMU it was right after a little period of upheaval there. There were some student demonstrations against the war in Vietnam, and the black students had taken over Pierce Hall.

GK: I didn't know that. I missed all of that.

MJ: I was going to ask if there was sort of remnants tension on campus when you arrived.

GK: I didn't notice it. I was a commuting student, driving back and forth from Detroit area to EMU so I didn't spend a lot of time interacting, unfortunately, with the students on campus.

MJ: In the same year that you came '71, I think, James Hoss came over from Western to take over the music department. The impression that I've gotten from a few readings was that he was able to make some good relationships with the faculty in the department. What were your impressions of him? He was here for 23 years.

GK: I liked him a lot. We got along very well. He heard me in Pease Auditorium for the first time I was singing *Mi Calia llestria*, I was rehearsing with Dr. Szabo and he came out of his office and remarked "who's that girl?" (laughs) and he would tell me the story every time I talked about him about how he first heard me singing. "We heard this voice

coming up the rafters.” His office was on the second level of Pease auditorium. So he heard us rehearsing there. It was complementary and encouraging most of the time with him. When I was still in the Opera Workshop, he was a great support because we had no money, no money, two percent in our program- a theatrical program. So we had to be very creative. He was supportive, he would find a little money for me here and there so that we could have costumes and maybe a little decoration, whatever. I really liked him because he helped me a lot as Opera Shop director and was encouraging me as performer. They would me go off and perform and then come back and teach make up the lessons or whatever I missed with the students.

MJ: Did you have an office as an instructor? Do you remember where that was? Because Alexander wasn't there yet, was it?

GK: No, they built Alexander while I was there, but we had a building, I think it's probably gone now, it was next to Pease Auditorium. It was old alexander. I did have an office in that building. Then when we moved to the new Alexander, I had an office in that building.

MJ: Did you have to share an office with anybody? Was it cramped? I'm always interested in what people's work environments were like.

GK: Well in the old building the offices were big, huge because it was an old building. Somebody's old house or something. So we had space for a grand piano and a space for students.

MJ: Hause lobbied to secure the funding for Alexander, but he also pushed through for some renovations for Pease. Can you noticed a difference in performing in Pease before the renovations and after?

GK: Well for one thing, it was a lot easier after the renovations. We had a lift that move up and down for the orchestra, like an orchestra pit. I used that a opera workshop director, we used that lift a lot. That was a lot easier. I didn't notice a change in the actual sound in Pease. Pease is a very good auditorium, great acoustic space as far as I'm concerned. The organ was gone, I think in the renovation, and they put the moveable organ in there, which was nice. It was good for Opera Workshop because we could move it out of the way. But the sound, I didn't notice a big change in the sound.

MJ: Is it something an opera singer notices from venue to venue?

GK: Absolutely. Acoustically, we are aware of what the overtones and what is coming back to you.

MJ: Okay. So do you have to modify your own singing a lot?

GK: I wouldn't modifying singing. That would be hard to do. Unless you are in a small venue and you don't want to blow the people out, I did modify my voice sometimes, not in Pease Auditorium.

MJ: When you are in Pease. This might be a dumb question but are opera usually mic'd?

GK: No, not usually.

MJ: Not even with stage mics?

GK: There are some stage mics at MLT. I've seen that, I've experienced that. I'm not a good mic person. I don't like mics. My voice doesn't like a microphone.

MJ: Doesn't need a microphone, maybe.

GK: Well I just-it changes the quality of my voice. It changes the quality of the sound.

MJ: I guess that's true because you have someone behind the soundboard who is just EQ'ing your voice. Like you've already worked out exactly-

GK: Exactly what I want to hear. But just as an aside in musical theatre-my son has been singing a lot of musical theater he's in Hamilton right now and he's singing George Washington. I noticed that they do mic the people in the theater and I can't tell the difference. I know his very well, and it's real big, he's a big 6'4 guy, big voice. And when he came on the stage I was thinking "why are they mic'ing him so much?" And he said (imitating) "they're not mom. They're not for me" I don't like mics on.

ABM: Can I ask a quick question about the Pease renovations? Were you involved in the fundraising for that?

GK: Probably, I do what people ask me to do. I do what they tell me to do. If they said "Glenda we'd like for you to sing today for blah blah blah could you sing "Un Bel Di" , they'd love to hear that." I'd say "yes, of course." It might have been for a fundraiser, just not up on things I should have been.

ABM: I just wanted to make sure that I asked the question that while we were talking about the renovations because that was a big project.

GK: A big project. Whenever the choir or orchestra ask the faculty to perform for that purpose yes I did participate.

MJ: You talked a little about in an interview that surveyed, you don't like your own quotes do you?

GK: Well, tell me what I had said.

MJ: I don't have a direct quote here but you talk about your different role as performer, director and teacher can be a real challenge. Just a lot of different hats to wear at the same time. I want to focus on the director role a little a bit: can you tell us about the Opera Workshop?

GK: Well, it was fun. I loved working with the students because they worked very hard. They put together a set, they stay up almost all night painting a set, putting together costumes. We worked so hard to make it legitimate because we are so close to the UM. We worked very hard to make things look good and sound good. All of them, I loved every one of them that were in the opera workshop because they were just very talented people. They didn't have a chip on their shoulder because they were talented. They just sang well and worked hard. It was indeed a *work shop*. Working in Pease Auditorium was-

MJ: Hard?

GK: Hard.

MJ: Why is that?

GK: Well at the time we were worked in Pease Auditorium it was still sort of dusty. Asphalt down in the basement. We painted set down there. We had many a pizza in that auditorium. I just loved the students, they pulled it all together every show. I was always worried at the last one would they or not.

MJ: It was the kind of thing where they put on a program at the end of a semester?

GK: Close to the end of the semester, that was the goal of the workshop, to present a program.

MJ: And that was on top of any recitals they had to do?

GK: Absolutely. It was a class that they attended.

MJ: What was your role as director of Opera Workshop? To keep people on track or?

GK: Well, I chose the music, chose the people to perform the music. Taught the music. Staged the show and then rehearsed the staging and rehearsed the show. Then we would put the show on.

MJ: Did you create it? Was it already in existence?

GK: The Opera Workshop? There was an Opera Workshop before I got there.

ABM: Who was the director?

GK: I was just trying to think that (laughs). One of the Bari tenors who went to perform with City Opera somewhere in California, why can't I think of his name? Anyway, the opera workshop was going strong before I got there.

MJ: Was it pretty well received?

GK: Usually it was. At one point when we came to the new Alexander Hall, Mary Teal was one of the music education professors. Somehow she had encouraged the students to come to the opera workshop and gave them credit for doing that, so we had a good audience in our recital hall for the shops in Alexander. Pease was a pretty big place to fill, so we didn't fill Pease Auditorium. We would get a good audience level at the lower level of Pease. They appreciated what we did.

MJ: When students sign up for that they all had vocal backgrounds?

GK: Absolutely. I did recruit some.

MJ: Okay you did. How did you know who to recruit?

GK: We had recital every Monday at 4 o'clock. The students would sing and you could hear the ones who could carry an opera workshop performance.

MJ: A recital every Monday?

GK: At four o'clock. And I'm the mother of three boys and I live in Southfield and I have to come through that five six o'clock traffic. Some days I would back to EMU, fed the kids, did a little homework went back to EMU for performances, for Opera Workshop, for meetings, for whatever. But I never complained about because I chose to live here in Southfield so that was a consequence of that.

ABM: May I ask you a follow up question to raising three young children and being a successful professional, mostly selfishly because I also have three young children?

GK: Oh congratulations.

ABM: Thank you very much. It's such a delicate balance, and things have changed culturally in the last few decades since you've had your boys, right? But what kind of support did you get from the department or do you have family close by? What was your network to help you succeed professionally while balancing that family?

GK: Mainly it was my husband. He was unusual for a husband in those days I guess, because he would come home, take care of the kids. He was a football coach, basketball coach, track coach, science teacher. Very active in his job as a teacher. But his job was closer to Southfield than Ypsi. So he could run home and do things and take care of the kids, whatever was necessary to do before I get home. And then you organized, I don't think we had a microwave in those days. I did have the oven with a timer, so I could throw food in there and time it to be ready for when I got home and ready for the kids. You just organize and get things done. My mother in law was helpful, my sister in law was helpful, but they were also working people, so they didn't have a lot of time during the week to babysit and all of that. But I did hire a babysitter to come in. She was a nice lady but I have to tell this story. I think it was Marcus who was playing the bass when he was a little thing. She was upstairs doing something, cleaning or something in the kitchen and he called 911 and said that he couldn't find some toy that he wanted. She called me at work "Ms. Kirkland! Marcus called the police on me!" I said "Oh, I'm so sorry." I said what happened and she said they called back and asked if everything was alright, was this child home alone? And she said "oh no ma'am I'm right here with him." That's my Marcus. Good example of my Marcus, he's the middle child.

ABM: That's great. Thank you for sharing that story.

MJ: When you were with EMU there were four different presidents. Sponberg.

GK: You shouldn't tell my age now.

MJ: (Laughter)

ABM: Not a reflection of your age.

MJ: Sponberg, Brickley, Porter, and Shelton. I was wondering if the music department was treated any differently for any of these presidents, if it was looked upon favorably or unfavorably?

GK: I liked all of them. Who's the first one?

MJ: Harrold Sponberg.

GK: Sponberg was very helpful, I think it was Sponberg, very helpful to the music department. They all liked the music department. At that time, the faculty sang the National Anthem and school song at graduation. I understand they don't do that anymore. There was a good relationship, like the band was certainly involved with whatever happened. They played at basketball games as well as football games, I believe. There were was a good relationship between the Department of Music and Dance and the administration.

MJ: I know that some people have told me that Sponberg really like to dance.

GK: Oh really?

MJ: When music came on he'd like to dance.

GK: Didn't know that.

MJ: Did you often have interactions with the presidents of EMU? Did you have personal impressions of the presidents? No one can speak about John Porter without gushing praise.

GK: Well I did have actually, he asked to me sing for-his wife asked to sing for a program that she did. We got to know each other. Then they asked me to sing a lot for whatever was going on at the university. I also sang at her funeral and at his funeral.

MJ: What his wife like?

GK: She was a wonderful lady. Just very friendly, distinguished, very approachable. I think she was involved with the children somehow. I didn't stay around EMU to know enough to know what's going on, but I know she was involved in helping children.

MJ: I wanted to go back to how you worked one on one with the vocal students. You said approach is to interpret the song to involve the audience as much as possible and that you do that do that by enjoying it as much yourself. Is that difficult to do?

GK: So you want to know how that works?

MJ: Yeah.

GK: Well you get involved with the music and text and learn it very well, and then forgot about what you learned, and then perform it. Not necessarily for the audience, for the sake of performance for the composer sake, and the person who wrote the poem.

MJ: I think I read a review of a show you were in. You were you performing Mahler. I can't remember the specific piece but the reviewer was floored by how you- I have his quote somewhere. It's really good, it's high praise. It's really cool. "She had her music in her heart and is not reading her part." and I love that. I think it's from the Ann Arbor news and just talking about talking about how natural- you were playing a child I think and singing a song about heaven does this ring a bell? A child that had passed away and you were singing about what heaven was like. You were dressed like a child. You were singing to the sky and the reviewer was like "I can't believe she's playing this part so naturally and she's not putting on any sort of adult drama right now." It is in 1999. I'm not sure what it was I'm sorry, I don't have it.

GK: I'll think about this after this over.

MJ: I just loved that praise because-

GK: That came as a result of a lot of hard work. Memorizing music, connecting the poem to the music and then performing it without trying to perform it if that makes any sense.

MJ: I'm just trying to understand why the performance stood out so much than the rest of the singers. Do you have any idea why that's hard for other people?

GK: No. (laughter) I don't know except what I've said, how I did that. Just a gift from God.

MJ: You just inhabit your role.

GK: Yes that's a good way to express it.

MJ: Over the course years of teaching did you notice any change in student interest in opera? Were there more students? Less as time went on?

GK: I think we had more interest at the end when I was about to leave EMU. Seemed to be still a good number of students wanting to perform. I think singers want to perform, they want an avenue to express their talent, and opera is one way to do that.

MJ: I'm trying to think of questions that aren't from the lens of someone who is terrified to get on stage and sing a song. I wonder if that- do you think the interest in the genre that has increased the number of students or just higher enrollment maybe?

GK: I don't know why. I think we give them an opportunity to sing choir, sing solos for recitals, sing operatic performances, sing theater. So the ones who interested in those choose one of those things.

MJ: People have asked you a lot why you are not with a major orchestra and why you are teaching for EMU when you could just be with-this is another quote of yours...

GK: I talk to much

MJ: You said in the 1991 EMU focus people ask you a lot you were at EMU when you could be with a major orchestra. That's a compliment right?

GK: That is a compliment, in a way. I'll take it as a compliment.

MJ: Could it be seen not as a compliment because they are saying something about EMU? What is that?

GK: Lack of knowledge of what we do at EMU. That's what that is. Haven't been to hear Joseph Gurt play the piano, or watch Szabo conduct the orchestra or hear how magical group which was very good in those days, or watch Blaine Ballard dance around, conducting the orchestra. I think he was a wonderful dancer. He really conducted well and pulled from the students what he wanted and they gave him what we wanted, but he had a little dance that I used to like to watch.

MJ: did you ever conduct?

GK: Nope. If I had to, I would sit in the pit and raise my arm slightly so they could see me. If they need to come in, if they needed help.

MJ: You kind of touched on something that was in one of my other questions in that same feature where people ask you why you are not with an orchestra you said "I don't think people now how good we are here as teachers"

GK: Exactly.

MJ: And I wonder why you think that is. Why don't people? Cause we're next to U of M?

GK: That's some of it and since I've left EMU you all are doing a much better job of advertising. What is that thing that I see on the billboard? Real EMU or something.

MJ: True EMU

GK: Yeah, they are doing a better job of advertising EMU

MJ: Where would advertisements be placed for concerts and things like that?

GK: I don't know

MJ: Eastern Echo maybe? I'm not sure either

GK: Oh yeah in the school paper, Ann Arbor paper, sometimes in the Free Press. Only if something spectacular happened like once we had **MLT** come to do Butterfly so we got a good advertisement for that. Or when the Detroit symphony would come to perform at Pease Auditorium, good advertisement for that. I think we were working so hard, producing so much, that we didn't just have time to publicize things. I know I didn't as the opera workshop director.

MJ: So if something was going to be promoted, you would have to do it yourself?

GK: Absolutely.

MJ: We're getting close to the end, we gotta couple more questions for you.

GK: You know I have refreshments for you. Wouldn't like to have something?

MJ: I would love that have that water bottle back there. I just wanted to ask, you said what you have is a gift from God, it's your duty to share it freely and that's why you teach. Do you think teaching at EMU has been has made it easier to share that gift than it would have at other places?

GK: Absolutely.

MJ: Why is that?

GK: Because I got a chance to teach and share with students and faculty and community.

MJ: What if you had been teaching at Juilliard? Would it have been as easy as sharing that gift at Eastern?

GK: Well I think so. A student is a student. You offer what you have. I would offer my talent to any student anywhere and do the best I can to teach what I know.

MJ: So we were hoping to get a couple lessons today.

GK: No, you're not. No, no, no. I know you said you wanted me to sing. I'm old lady now, over 70 years old. What you heard was in my twenties. You don't want to hear me sing now.

MJ: I wanted to actually ask that you told me that after singing for so long and then retiring and not singing as much, is there a vacancy there? You have to fill some other way after done it for so many years.

GK: Actually I do sing with my church choir and that is fulfilling somewhat, even though it is mostly gospel music. I can convince them to sing something semi-classical from time to time, a nice hymn. But I've got piano and I can play enough to play the **24 Italian art songs** that I used to love to sing or hymns or something for myself. I teach whatever I can teach to anybody who wants to learn.

ABM: May I ask a question? What was it that made you decide to retire when you decided to retire?

GK: Oh it was way overtime.

ABM: Why?

GK: Well my husband had retired, and he was retired five years already. We wanted to do some things together and I think I had been at EMU long enough and I enjoyed it and I missed it. I still miss EMU and I still get up thinking that I have to drive to EMU this morning (laughter). But it was a good time, I'm blessed to have done that.

MJ: After seeing so many photos of you, headshots or-

GK: I apologize I've changed.

MJ: But I've seen so many things, I've read interviews, I've read reviews of your performances and-

GK: Do you do that for everyone you interview?

MJ: Yeah, but no has been as famous as you

GK: Famous?

MJ: So in every interview or write up you're always praising everybody else around you but meanwhile you are the one who is always being interviewed.

GK: Did I do that today? No.

MJ: Yeah with some of your colleagues and things like that. I admire that.

GK: May I ask a question on the record? Now what will you do with this interview?

ABM: So primarily, the University Archives' purpose is to preserve the stories of the university. Part of our goal with project of reaching out to emeritus faculty, students, alumni is to do a better job of documenting the stories that often aren't documented because they aren't as you said in the beginning "all of the important people." because there are a lot of important people that make the university what it is and they are not often reflected in the historical record. So our goal with these interviews is to help tell a more complete stories of who makes the university what we are as an institution, sort of the threads of the fabric. Our goal is to collect that type of material and then make it available for current students who are doing research, for members of the public who are interested, we get researchers from all of the country looking at public institutions and public education. We're a public institution, we're open to the public so we try to make ourselves as open and available as we can. So that's who uses the archives. But they come to use us for the things they're interested in. So what we are finding things that we don't necessary have that fit their needs, so that's what we are trying to do with that process. Does help that answer your question?

GK: Yes that helps. I'm glad we have this for EMU.

MJ: Just a couple more things. What do you think are the strengths of EMU? You can be as general and broad. I'll also ask what the weaknesses are.

GK: Well when I was at EMU, it really was the faculty. The students recruited personally recruited and it did help to build a good reputation in the Department of Music. At that time it was Department of Music. Not Department of Music and Dance. We could go out and sing, I could out and sing for an organization venue and have people come up to me and say "oh I have a daughter who sings" and I would encourage them to look us up.

MJ: Any thoughts about the weaknesses of the institution?

GK: Well, I really don't know. I just know we've gotten some bad publicity in the past with whatever's been going on with the social media. You know what I'm talking about. I can't really think about anything negative about the Department of Music that I would like to share.

MJ: Okay. Is there anything that you would like to put on the record? Any other thoughts?

GK: I can't think of anything. I just, I do miss some of the close friends I had there. I miss performing with Gary Peason and Ann Gaida, Joseph Gurt and some of the other performers. We had an interesting, the only other black lady on the faculty was Letty Austin and she was a composer, a pianist composer. We perform a lot after she left EMU and made recordings together. But I sort of miss her. She did pass a few years ago.

MJ: (To ABM) Do you have any other questions?

ABM: I'm sure I'll think of some. We can pause, if I think of any, you'll be kind enough to let us turn on the recorder back on?

GK: Oh if you insist.

ABM: How many years were you area chair?

GK: Oh gosh, I'm just gonna guess ten. I think it was more than that. Don't quote me on that because I don't know for sure.

ABM: is that just how the department is structured? You have the department head, then you have area chairs?

GK: We did, that what was going on, I don't know what they are doing now.

ABM: Would you get release time for that? Being an area chair?

GK: Yes, some. One or two hours.

ABM: Yes, it's never enough

GK: We would have lunch together and I won't say party, but do things together. When our students went to NATS out of town, we all stayed together, supported each other, stay in hotels, ate together, we did everything together. That was good camaraderie together. I don't know what happens now.

MJ: Was your husband musical?

GK: Well he claims he taught me everything I know (laughter) And if you met him you would understand. He played the piano and the drums. He sings in the church choir with me, I shouldn't say with, with the church choir. That's something we do together. But, no.

MJ: Do you have a favorite song to sing?

ABM: Not to sing right now. Just in general.

GK: My favorite operatic composer is Puccini and he liked my voice and I liked his music. I would sing whatever Puccini I could sing. Lot of people wanted me to sing Bel Di a lot and I did. I would teach every soprano my favorite Puccini repertoire and they liked it.

ABM: What was the least favorite thing you performed?

GK: Some 21st century piece by some electronic oriented composer. Trying to find the pitch and where it's going-what's the point of this anyway? I don't have any names. Can't name any composers like that.

ABM: It's okay. I played the cello growing up and played in a quartet and my least favorite piece was "Canon in D" just as the cellist you're playing the same note over and over keeping the rhythm. Anyways, that was just me.

GK: So you play the piano too?

MJ: yeah, I play a lot of stuff. I'm a singer songwriter. Toured around a lot. Put out a lot of albums.

GK: Great! Have I heard some of your music?

MJ: I doubt it. I'm not very well known. But I have been doing it for a long time. Played cool places, played Hill Auditorium, played down at the Ark a lot in Ann Arbor. But mostly

guitar, singing a lot. I took one lesson from an opera singer a long time ago and it helped so much. She just taught me how to breathe. And I don't know if I follow her advice every time I sing.

GK: Probably not. You can't do that and really perform well.

MJ: But it did change, it seems so basic to breathe from down here. Sing from down here and that helped me out. And now that I've been singing for so long, how could it be any other way? I hear myself on recordings from 15 years ago and I just cringe because it's all in my nose.

GK: And in your throat.

MJ: Did you ever have to teach students that were total beginners with opera?

GK: Oh yeah, absolutely.

MJ: No experience, no control.

GK: Almost everyone who came to EMU had no experience. Mostly they sang with the high school choir or something like that. But opera? No. They had no idea what they were in for-some of them not all of them.

MJ: Did they know what they were in for?

GK: They just knew they liked music. I would just give them my syllabus with pages and pages of information. Pictures of the voice, of the voice, how sound comes out. Pictures of the diaphragm, rib cage. Just basic information that some singers need to know. They would look at that and be a little overwhelmed, but I would bring them back to reality. Just sing a song because it's basically it's what we are for-to sing. Now we'll learn how we're doing this after we learn to enjoy. That's sort of how I taught.

MJ: I can't imagine either teaching someone or being a student and learning how to sculpt a voice into an operatic voice.

GK: Well, that's not the goal to make them an operatic singer. Make them sing in a healthy voice, make them a good singer. Now you can make them sing the way you want to sing, you can sing opera, musical theatre, gospel, whatever you want to sing. But you know what you are doing when you sing. I should remember that, I taught that (laughter).

MJ: Vibrato. What's the secret?

GK: Oh that's a whole voice lesson, honey. That takes a while. You have to look at how the singer produces a tone and where the tensions are. There's going to be tension in your

voice, but where? And how is that affecting your sound? And not necessarily what you want to do with your voice, but how are you performing. How are you producing the tone? And then we get what you are going to do with it. I feel like I'm giving a voice lesson here.

ABM: Is that part of the performance process? That question of "what you want to do with it" is that all about where you're performing or the piece of music your performing. What exactly goes into that decision process.

GK: Usually a singer knows what they want to do with their voice. So I teach them how to sing and then if they want to sing hip-hop or rap, bye-bye. Not me, I'm over 70. But if they want to sing a lot a vocal line where you have a melody, connecting the notes, and I can hear the melody and you can repeat it back to me, we can do that. There is a lot of music that will cover: R&B, gospel music, playing with guitar. You can sing in a healthy way with just about instrument really.

MJ: We see so many of these rock stars, even heavy metal singers taking lessons now.

GK: Really? Taking lessons?

MJ: Not taking lesson really, but it seems like a new trend that these who have always been screamers to start singing and going to professionals, learning how to use your voice make sure your vocal chords won't hemorrhage. It's what a lot of them are doing now, and its changing music a little bit because you're starting to see Metallica and he's singing-he's not screaming. It's an interesting change just how to use your voice.

GK: That's a challenge for me in gospel choir because so many of them scream the notes, and I just sing the notes. We had one choir director come and she was teaching them. "I'm going to teach how to sing a phrase, use good breath support and not scream with your voice." So one of the girls said "do we all have to sing like Glenda?" (laughter) . I said "oh dear, oh dear. Maybe I'm having some influence here."

ABM: Did you give lessons to your youngest?

GK: I did. It was funny, he was singing for- gosh I think of all these famous people- beautiful mezzo soprano from the Met came to Marygrove college to give a workshop and sang for MLT. He was singing for her and she said "who taught you to sing like this?" and he said "my momma." Everyone thought that was so funny. She didn't ask who was your momma, he just said "my momma taught me to sing like that." He was 11th or 12th grade, so I went up to afterwards and I said "I'm his momma, I've had some operatic training, that's why he said that." Denise Graves-that's who it was. Do you know that name? Denise Graves? Wonderful mezzo soprano singing at the Met. Anyway, she's good.

MJ: I'd love to play that recording.

ABM: You should pull it up on your phone.

GK: Was this something with Joe Gurt?

MJ: I think so. I think that's what this particular one is. There's another one where I think he's playing piano and someone's playing the cello. And there are a few, I think it's a trio of Joe Gurt and Szabo and someone playing the clarinet? And it's just gorgeous.

ABM: Did Christy Moretta teach clarinet or oboe?

GK: Clarinet. Wait, was it oboe? May have been oboe. I think it's oboe. But it wasn't Christy I performed with there. That was before Christy, Joseph Gurt and Szabo.

MJ: Szabo, what instrument did he play? Was he the cellist?

GK: I think it was the cello? I mostly saw him conduct the orchestra.

MJ: That's it 1974.

GK: Oh wow 1974, I had just gotten there

Recording plays

GK: (Commenting on the recording) That's the long recitative. The opening. Now we get to the aria.

Recording continues

GK: That girl was pretty good.

MJ: So what do you think?

GK: Wow that Joseph Gurt. Was that Joseph Gurt playing?

MJ: Yeah

GK: He's wonderful. I miss him.

ABM: You were pretty wonderful too.

GK: That was not bad. There are spots I would change in there but not bad.

Eastern Michigan University Archives, Oral Histories

ABM: So this is part of what Matt's been digitizing all of these different faculty recitals and recordings from the department records. We took in collection of about 75 boxes from the department the former departmental secretary-I'm totally blanking on her name

GK: Was it Marsha Bolden?

ABM: Yes. Maybe. Not Marsha, Marsha is still in the department. Anyways, she had a closet full of the departmental history, all of the faculty files and instructors and adjunct and grad assistants right before she retired, she was just like " I can't protect these anymore" so she transferred to the archives. Part of what came was some of these recordings. So you can listen to these from the comfort of your home. All of these past faculty members, Gurt and Szabo. So we'll send you the information.

GK: I'd love to. Hopefully my computer will work.

ABM: Marcus will pull it up for you on his phone. (laughter)