



Interview No. SAS3.19.02
Morris Queen

Interviewer: Ken Osowski
Location: Randalstown, Maryland
Date: March 19, 2002

Edited by: NMH 1/27/03

Q: All right. It is Tuesday, March 19th, 2002, and we are here in Randallstown, Maryland. My name is Ken Osowski, and I am going to be interviewing Mr. Morris C. Queen for the Peabody-Johns Hopkins Oral History Project, Music of Baltimore. How are you Mr. Queen?

Queen: Fine. Thank you.

Q: Just so we have it on tape, could you give us your full name?

Queen: My full name is Morris Chester Queen.

Q: Just let's start at the beginning I guess. There's a lot to talk about, but could you tell us where and when you were born?

Queen: I was born in Baltimore, Maryland, September 30th, 1921.

Q: And I mean, you have a very, very rich musical past so I guess maybe you can start at the beginning. Where did you begin your music education or where were you first exposed to music?

Queen: Well, my father used to play music every Sunday on an old wind-up Victrola. And these were old 78 records. Well, they were all classical records that were given to him by the people that my mother worked for. And some were piano pieces, some were orchestral pieces, some were choral pieces.

I started studying piano at age 7, and my teacher was a Mrs. Manila Smith. I studied with her for about six years. I began playing the piano in public at age 9, and that was in my church when she was absent as my teacher. She was absent one Sunday, and the pastor asked if I would come up and play the hymns for him. And I went up and played. I was short, couldn't reach the pedals, which was a blessing as far as I was concerned because I didn't know how to use the pedals in the first place.

Q: So you mentioned that you were exposed to a lot of records in your house. Were your parents musical; were they musicians themselves?

Queen: They played piano, but they didn't play piano by reading. In those days most Blacks could play chords on the piano like tonic, subdominant, dominant, back to tonic. And basically from that you could sing most of the pieces that they were singing which were religious pieces in the first place, which was mostly hymns. You'd say, well, you wouldn't go the supertonic or the mediant or the leading tone; you weren't involved with that, you just say tonic, subdominant, dominant, back to tonic.

Q: So you were exposed to classical music and then also to church music?

Queen: We were raised with church; I was raised in the church. That was almost a law for the children cause the whole family went to church every Sunday, and just about stayed in church all day at that time. I'm talking about the 1920s or 30s.

Q: What church did you go to when you were young?

Queen: Mt. Zion Methodist Episcopal Church. That's the church. Of course it's no longer Episcopal. Now Methodist, United Methodist as it's known today. Not called Episcopal any longer.

Q: And where is that?

Queen: The church now is divided, split up into three different churches. Mt. Zion, St. Luke's and St. Mark's. From that one church they just split and went, formed three churches out of one. I didn't stay with them too long cause 1943 I went into the United States Navy.

Q: So at Mt. Zion you played piano and organ?

Queen: I didn't bother that much with the organ; mostly piano.

Q: Okay. Did you direct the youth choir there?

Queen: I directed the youth choir. I was about seventeen, eighteen years old. I sang top on the senior choir. I played for the chorus choir and directed the youth choir. So that's why I have such an interest in choral music as opposed to instrumental music.

Q: And then also at this time were you getting exposure and education to music through your schools and high school?

Queen: Yes. We had high school music.

Q: Where did you go to school?

Queen: I went to Frederick Douglass Senior High School and Booker T. Washington Junior High School. That's where I went to school.

Q: And then you entered the Navy in 1943.

Queen: Yes. 1943. May of 1943, yes. In Great Lakes, Illinois, that's where I was stationed.

Q: And I read a little bit about this. You were in the Great Lakes Octet.

Queen: I was in it and also the director and arranger of the Great Lakes Octet. And this group traveled in the United States and two countries outside, Hawaii and Okinawa. And we went there to sing for the wounded veterans who had been brought back from Japan and the islands where they had been fighting. And we went there to entertain.

I was, this group, Great Lakes Octet was put in what was called in those days Ships Company, and we were confined to Camp Lawrence and Camp Smalls. And during this period, we traveled over the United States by train, by plane, by bus, by cab, and when we were traveling, we sang mostly at churches, colleges, and at theaters. But we mostly sang spirituals and some secular songs like "Passing By" by Purcell- things of that nature. And "Invictus" by Bruno Hahn.

We didn't sing hymns. That was not for the octet, that was for the Blue Jacket Choir. Every camp had a choir. I not only trained the octet, but I trained the choir that sang every Sunday morning for Protestant service. I trained the little choir for the Catholic service. So we had three services on Sunday morning, not counting the one where we broadcast over CBS radio. And we broadcast over CBS radio for two years.

And that's where I met one Navy gentleman who was responsible for me going to college. He told me that I needed to go to college to study theory. And he said study all the music you can cause you've got talent, and you don't even know that you have talent. And he was an assistant at St. John the Divine in New York; played a whole lot of organ.

And every Sunday morning E. Power Biggs would come on, and I would go over to the broadcast studio, and I could always try to remember what kind of melody he had played that morning. Might be something about Bach, something by Buxtehude, and he would say, oh, you mean this. He right off play it, and that to me was amazing.

Q: So did this get you further interested in organ?

Queen: Yes. It did. Because I was fascinated by what I saw him do. He wasn't playing pipe organ. We didn't have pipe organs at Great Lakes. We had the big Hammonds, small Hammonds, and the spinet type.

I performed one of his choral pieces. He had a choral piece called the *Lord is My Shepherd* by Tom, his name was Thomas Matthews.

Q: Okay. Yes. I remember that.

Queen: He was my buddy, my true buddy. And if anybody says anything about my mentors- Tom Matthews and Robert Shaw.

Q: Do you want to talk about how you got to meet Robert Shaw?

Queen: Well, we were invited to New York. See we broadcast over the radio, and so we couldn't go all the places we were called upon to go, for the Navy couldn't allow that. The Navy only selected those areas that they thought would publicize Great Lakes.

We were invited to New York by a lady by the name Mrs. Ogden Reed, the owner of the *Herald Tribune*. She had many of the generals who were in World War II at these forums, and she invited the Great Lakes Quartet to be on one of the programs, and that was how I met Robert Shaw. Robert Shaw was interested in how I made the arrangements that I made for the group to sing. I told him I didn't know to write music, and he offered me a scholarship to the Juilliard.

He gave me his address, and later on I, when I was discharged from the Navy, my mother took ill, she had a slight heart attack, and I didn't want to leave home to go all the way to New York. So I ended up using the GI Bill, the rights for some of my education. I went to Howard University, but I would go to Robert Shaw's workshops and would talk to him. And I was fortunate enough, just recently before he died when he came to Baltimore, a few years ago, to go backstage; and I carried one of my scrapbooks, and I said, "Do you remember this?" He looked at it and looked at me, and he remembered who I was. So we both were getting ready to go into our eighties.

Q: And so what year did you enter Howard?

Queen: 1947. That was the year I entered Howard. I entered Howard, and I entered as a voice major. I was fortunate enough to, having been in the Navy and talked to most of the musicians who were there. Most of the musicians, whites and Blacks who were there, were college professors of music, and I would go to them with all kinds of questions, and ask them about this, about that. So when I got to Howard, I was really, say, a junior in some areas of music because I had no problems sight-reading music. I had no problems reading music to play the piano. I had a knowledge of chords. I even knew jazz chords, and fooled around with the jazz bands.

So that was a great help to me as well. And by having that background, I wouldn't tell my professors I can do that blindfold. You know, they give you harmony exercises. Of course, I played hymns, and hymns are basically structured harmony, all of the chords. You know, tonic, subdominant, supertonic, tonic 6, tonic 6-4, and all that crazy stuff. The leading tone chord, altered chords, and supertonic 6-4-3s.

And I used to laugh at it cause I commuted, I didn't live on campus. I caught a train every day to go to Howard and come back home.

Q: At this point were you living in downtown Baltimore?

Queen: I lived in Baltimore with my mother and father. Yes, I lived in the city.

Q: What part of town?

Queen: I lived in the Northwest.

Q: So most of the arranging you did before you went to Howard like for the Great Lakes Octet, you would just, you'd do it by ear sort of?

Queen: Yes.

Q: You'd teach the musicians this by ear?

Queen: I'd hear this as we working on something, and I just filed it away. Like, for example, I knew that for having seen music that was written for male groups, I knew that most of it was C, A flat or B flat. When you went to E flat, D flat and the F chord, F major chord, you were going in mixed choir. You had to think of the sopranos but you couldn't put the men up in that range.

So that's how I learned. I could just hear it. That's all it was. Some people are just fortunate enough to have an ear to hear music that way.

The dean called me downstairs one day and said, Morris, why don't you take a second degree? I said a second degree, why? He said, well, you can graduate in three years. So I said okay. And that's what I got the Bachelor of Music Education to be able to teach public music in the public school system. I graduated in five years. I did seven years of work in five years. I graduated at the top of our class with a 3.7 average.

Q: So it was a double major in music education and vocal performance?

Queen: Vocal music which is Bachelor of Music, and a Bachelor of Music Education, BME.

Q: So this would be 1952 when you finished college?

Queen: '52. 1952.

Q: I think I read, so you were the first person to graduate with two music degrees from Howard?

Queen: Right- in music.

Q: And then also you mentioned earlier that when you started at Howard some professors there thought you would become a piano major.

Queen: Yes. But I said I didn't want to be a piano major. I said I was interested in choral music, but that I spent most of my life as a young man listening to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. And I thought there was nobody in the world that could sing like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. And then I started listening to the Robert Shaw Chorale, which was a much smaller group, and that amazed me. I said he could make that small group sound almost like the three hundred and seventy voices of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

And then I would go out to concerts and listen too. Then I used to go down to the Peabody even though that had to be a favor. We had segregation, and Blacks were not allowed in the audience. We had to go up in the balcony and stand in the balcony. Because I was there to hear Virgil Fox. Went to the Lyric to hear Rachmanoff. Real long, tall, gaunt looking man. I also heard a man at Peabody play the organ, Louis Robert who was Virgil Fox's teacher. I would also go to hear other concerts of choral singing.

And then one year I was what you might call a vice principal at Peabody. When I was teaching in Baltimore City schools during the summer, we were handling gifted and talented black and white students. They had a program there for them where they were taught by professors. And my job was to check the rolls and make sure the kids went to class. Sometime I'd have to take the choir over. Thank goodness he didn't ask me to take the band over; couldn't have helped him there.

Q: So when was the summer program at Peabody?

Queen: Oh, I can't remember that now. But I know I was teaching, I was still teaching in the public school system.

You know, I'd help with putting on summer little short musicals. And one year I had about twenty Hammond organs and Lowrey organs in organ class. We did a program at Poly-Western [High School], which was a lot of fun.

Q: Just to backtrack a little bit, to get back to your years at Howard, after you graduated in '52 with a bachelor's, you then moved on and did a master's there.

Queen: Yup. I went back to Howard in 1955 and that goes back Thomas Matthews. Because he told me that, you know, you need to study some composition as well as the theory. Because I used to, I could always write, he said that's no problem. I'd tell my church choir. I said I can write a new hymn. I said just give me a hymn, I'll write you a new tune for the words.

And they were amazed that I was able to do that. And sometime I amazed myself, and my professor, the late Mark Fax, when I went to his class in composition, he'd say, okay, you take board on that side, I'll take board on this side. We're gonna write a song form and trio. He'd play mine; I'd play his.

He would say we'll take a spiritual and we'll turn it into a hymn. That's how, then I worked on my thesis which was for the organ.

Q: Yes. So this was the passacaglia you wrote for your thesis. And it was in the style of Bach?

Queen: Of Bach's passacaglia.

Q: And ultimately you arranged this for orchestra and it was performed.

Queen: Transformed from organ to symphony orchestra.

Q: And then how did that eventually performed? It was performed by the National Symphony in Washington D. C.

Queen: Every now and then, you know, they will have things come up, and I was the only one who could represent Howard. I was the only, in fact, I was the first master's recipient in 1957 of Howard. And I just happened to have a piece ready to be played. They had students from Capital University, American University, all those schools. They had composition majors who were turning compositions. I was the only Black to represent Howard.

Q: So you were the first master's student of composition at Howard?

Queen: That's right.

Q: Did you find it difficult to make the transition from organ to writing for a full orchestra?

Queen: Oh Lord, yes. Totally different and extremely difficult. Because you have, with the organ, if you have C minor, you have C minor. If you're doing it for the orchestra, your clarinets are going to be in one key, your French horn is going to be in another key. Your cello is going to use one clef, viola is going to use another cleft. It was a trip. The only thing you can have some peace with would be your strings to a point, And oh, the transposing trumpets, I forgot about them. HERE

But that's what makes it difficult. Because you have to remember and have the tuning of the timpani.

Q: Were you happy with the result?

Queen: Oh yes.

Q: And it was performed at Constitution Hall?

Queen: Yes. And the thing about that was, when I played it on the piano along with my teacher, I got one sonority. When I had the organ teacher playing and I sat in the back of Rankin Chapel, he had enormous talent. But when you hear it performed by an orchestra, it's like day and night.

Q: So wasn't it around this time you also started working with the Morris Queen Chorale?

Queen: That was in 1954. The Chorale was the finest choral group I ever worked with. We didn't have anything in the state of Maryland that was equal to that group. Not because I was the director, it was because of him, Robert Shaw. Going to his workshops, he used to tell us when you form a community group, you can't get this with a church choir unless you are lucky. But if you form a choral group of community singers, and you got to use the audition as a palette. You get a soprano in one range, and then you've got to color it with another soprano, and then you color it with a soprano against the two until you get the sound of sopranos that nobody else has. You do that with each section.

Then you work. That way you know what you want. I say you got a roof and you got a foundation and then you got some chairs and some drapes for your tenors and your altos. He said, now if you're going to buy some cheap drapes, you're gonna get a cheap alto sound. And if you buy damask cloth for your altos, then you got that chest sound like a cello when you go to A low, middle C. And he was right.

And with that group, they loved singing. They would get angry if I cut the rehearsals off after an hour. They would go around to each other's houses and sit down and rehearse by themselves. And they sang everything. For the most part, I would say ninety percent of their singing I had them sing acapella.

They'd sing Randall Thompson's Alleluia backwards, forwards, upside down. Beethoven's Hallelujah Chorus from the Mount of Olives- tear it up. They were that kind of group. They loved Bach. "Priceless Treasure," they loved that. They sang all spirituals.

As I said, they were the first black choir to ever sing in the Lyric Theater. We sang the choruses of *Porgy and Bess*. This was the first black choir to ever sing at Ford's Theater, and we did the production of *Showboat* with the late actor, William Bendix. Some of the choir members were singers and some were actors in that show.

Of course they had a command performance to sing aboard a battleship here in Baltimore, the Sierra. They were commanded to do that by the, I guess they found out I was in the Navy, someone said something. Of course they sang in Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and just about every church in Baltimore.

Q: Can you just talk a little bit about Fords Theater. I'm not familiar with it.

Queen: Well that was something. The Mechanic took its place. It was an ornate building. That was the first time I'd ever been there. I said, Baltimore was highly segregated.

Q: About what time did the segregation start to relax a little bit?

Queen: I would say just a little bit before, to me there seemed to be a lot more freedom right after World War II. Because it's around that time when Blacks start moving further out into the city. And, of course, blacks always lived out in Randallstown. In fact, they tell me that most of Randallstown was black. I don't know if that's what they say. So I just go by what I've heard people say.

That's when they started to integrate the schools because our school system had Douglass High School, Dunbar High School, Carver High School. Blacks could not go to those schools.

Q: So what year was this that you did the performance of *Showboat*?

Queen: I can't remember that.

Q: But how large was the group, the chorale?

Queen: Oh they ranged in the area of forty to forty-five. Very rarely we would always have that many because of people's jobs and other factors, you know, working. But basically whenever I wanted to do a program, I always had the right complement. And you could not sing with me unless you passed the quartet voice check-out.

When we got ready and had a concert coming up, I would say Mary, Martha, John, Peter to the back let me have Randall Thompson's Alleluia. Here's the pitch. I'll give you one, two, three, hit. And then I'd say let me have *I Got a Crown of His Kingdom*. Let me have Rider's version. Cause I gave them some of these spirituals we'd have more than one arrangement. I'll give you the pitch. Now if you haven't paid attention to rehearsal, and I found you weak on your part, I'd mark it down. But I'd always call you back another night. I'd say oh by the way, let me have that Rider piece again. You might not have the same soprano or tenor and bass, but you'd have complement for a quartet. They already knew if I don't know my music, I'm not going to be allowed in any concerts.

So they didn't have any comeback. And that's what made them learn their music.

Q: So did you do a lot of arranging for the group also?

Queen: To a point. But most of my arranging was for spirituals. Because some spirituals, I just didn't care for what they're doing. Today one of my favorite arrangers of spirituals is Moses Hogan. I think he does an excellent job, and it's new and fresh. Spirituals were simple pieces of music of a people who were struggling. Keep it simple. That's what I always try to do with spirituals. I was more interested in the beauty they projected.

Q: So that your repertoire with the chorale was in classics, sort of Bach, and also in spirituals?

Queen: Yes. But we sang classical, secular songs. "Madame Jeanette," Deems Taylor's "Waters Ripple and Flow," all that. Pieces like that used a lot of piano. Deems Taylor was noted for having excellent accompaniment. His accompaniment was equal to his vocal part of the music. So we did all kinds of music during that period of time, which is a little different now. "Climb Every Mountain." Pieces from the Broadway musical.

Q: *The Sound of Music*?

Queen: Yes, and "You'll Never Walk Alone."

Q: So now you also, after your master's, then when did you start teaching in Baltimore City schools?

Queen: 1959. Started at Lemmel Junior High School. And I was a just a regular teacher. 1961 I was a regular department head. Was a department head for twenty-three years. I retired 1984. Taught fifteen years junior high school, ten years senior high school. And senior high school I used to put on Broadway musicals. *Hello Dolly*, *Guys and Dolls*, *L'il Abner*, musicals like that.

In fact, I was asked to come to that school because they knew I could do that. I used to do miniature musicals, not that kind, but these were miniature musicals where the students went on stage and did a little musical idea. We had teachers who formed these little musical ideas ourselves, and we'd take, borrow a song that would fit what we would be doing just to give children the idea of what a musical was all about.

Q: Did you also direct the choirs in the schools?

Queen: Twenty-five years I had twenty-five choirs. Every year I had a different choir because children would graduate so you'd have spots to fill. When a new seventh grade came in, I had a brand new seventh grade group of students to draw from because I'd lost the ninth grade from graduation.

Q: And all this time you're still very active with the Morris Queen Chorale?

Queen: Oh yes. Then after that I had another community group, the Baltimore Chapel Choir. This was made up of some members of the Morris Queen Chorale. And we had another very good choir in Baltimore around that time, the Great Hymns Choir. That was conducted by a minister, Rev. Daniel Rideout. When he passed away and the Morris Queen Chorale ceased to be, they joined this choir together. This was in 1974, and we sang Handel's Messiah every Christmas. We did the Christmas portion of the Messiah. For about twenty-five years, we did that portion.

I just started working with that, and that same group sang Brahms's Requiem. Dubois's "Seven Last Words." Mendelssohn's Hymn of Praise. And we traveled, in fact, got an award where we sang in Dayton, and the guy that played the piano, a guy named Dr. Mack Statham — very good pianist. He wrote a composition called Trilogy. We performed that several times, and it was also performed by the One Voice Choir at the Meyerhoff [Symphony Hall] a few years ago.

That's why I asked you about Eric Conway. Because Eric Conway, he played one of two pianos with three trumpets, two trombones, tuba and timpani.

Q: Actually, I wanted to ask you about Dr. Mack Statham because I'm going to be interviewing him also a little bit later on.

Queen: Heck of a musician. In fact, everybody that knows me would say, Morris, when you go to do something musically, who do you have with you? I'd say Dr. Mack Statham and Ms. Audrey McCallum, a graduate from Peabody- piano. Plays a whole lot of piano. Because usually when we do things together, he plays the organ and she plays the piano, or we do two pianos. He graduated from Hampton, the same place where his father graduated from, Hampton Institute. Very good musician.

Mack is very close friend of mine. Funny thing, what I like about Mack Statham is we know our place. He calls me Rachmaninoff and I call him Horowitz. And I say, "We got it backwards cause you're tall. You should be Rachmaninoff, and a little short person like me should be

Horowitz." He plays a lot of piano. Even at his age still able to. And reads! Very few things you can put before him that he won't read right off the bat.

I have a friend, another friend here in Baltimore does that. He plays with a guy who gives regular concerts here, Simon Estes. Julius Tilman. We used to have in the school system that all the teachers would have, you know, workshop meetings. And we'd be checking through new music that the companies would come to our workshop and would bring anthems or pieces of music for choirs to try, and the teacher would look through it. And only one person of all those teachers at that place, and the supervisor would call out Julius. And we'd all sit back. And a whole lot of people in there could play it, but they'd have to go and practice it. And he's from Howard, a graduate.

Q: Speaking of piano, you mentioned earlier that you played piano your whole life, but you said you never actually owned a piano.

Queen: No.

Q: So you just used the one at church?.

Queen: Wherever I worked, I was working with music was being used, so I had pianos in the Navy; I had pianos in church; I had pianos in school. So I didn't have a need to purchase one. And then too in most of the instances I had grand pianos. I had grand pianos to work with. And then I was always in places where I could do it quietly. Not bother anybody and nobody bothered me.

Because at school, as I said, I'd get there early in the morning. Nobody in the room but me. At church I'd go there when we're not having church. Nobody there but me. The same thing in the Navy. I'd go in the big drill hall, and you'd hear echoes all over the place.

Q: We've covered a lot of time, but almost this whole time you've been at Sharp Street Memorial Methodist Church.

Queen: Right.

Q: And you're still there to this day?

Queen: Right now.

Q: That must have been over fifty years.

Queen: Fifty-five. It was fifty-five last month, February. I went there the same year that I went to Howard, 1947. Same year I went to Sharp Street Church.

Q: So what do you do there? Now you still playing organ?

Queen: Working with the choir.

Q: And you've been out Randallstown for how long now?

Queen: Since 1974.

Q: You've been in the Baltimore area your whole life?

Queen: All my life except when I was in service. Other than that, been in Maryland all my life. But I've seen most of the United States. I had seen, had been in over thirty-seven states before I was twenty-five.

Q: This is mostly traveling with the Great Lakes Octet?

Queen: Yes. Because of that group I was able, I tell people I said I saw things that cost me not red cent. And I take my wife to a lot of places, like when I went to Hawaii. And I told her, it didn't look like this when I came here. And places like that. So I try to take her to a lot of places where I've been. Of course, she's been to a lot of places on her own. All over the world and back. Traveled all over the United States.

Q: Do you have any insight on what makes Baltimore unique as a musical community?

Queen: I really never tried to figure that out. I guess some places are just like that. Cause then too you say, well, my church choir was about the first black choir, in fact we still are, the only choir to ever sing at Timonium United Methodist, Towson United Methodist, Lovely Lane United Methodist, Mt. Vernon United Methodist, and Mary Our Queen Cathedral.

They can't do this now because they don't have the complement of choir members, and most of us are pretty near my age. But for church service, Dubois's *Seven Last Words*. I mean for the morning service, and *Christ Lay in Death's Bonds* by Bach. That way back. I had a complement of voices to sing it.

I look at choirs today and it disturbs me that you don't see men. Tenors are almost unheard of. And yet in some places like Washington D. C. and New York, you have choirs of men and boys; whole lots of basses, baritones, and tenors. Not here. We had a visiting choir here Sunday. It had three men on it.

Q: Three men out of how many?

Queen: Three men out of the eleven. And a couple of them were singing melody.

Q: And yourself, you're a tenor.

Queen: Used to be. I was first tenor. First tenor. Because I gave my recital. Because you have to, when you're a major, you know, you have to give your recital. We had what was called at Howard jury every Thursday. And when you had that jury, my piano teacher would say, okay, you're up. My voice teacher, he'd say, you're up.

And whatever you were working on, you went up there and sang before your classmates and all of the faculty. I'd say, what do the theory teachers know about what I'm doing?

Q: Well, we've covered a lot of ground. Is there anything else you want to add or talk about?

Queen: No. You already found out that I had a hobby of bowling. I was president of my bowling league for twenty-five years.

Q: Okay. Do you still bowl?

Queen: No. Most people don't realize. My church could tell you, my wife will tell you- I painted this whole apartment.

Q: Yeah. I read that you've always been interested in...

Queen: ...manual labor. I could build just about a whole house. That's because my father did things like that for a living. I used to work with him. Summertime when I didn't go to Howard summer school, I'd be working with him. Plastering, cementing, roofing, all that kind of stuff. I enjoy doing it. Still do. I don't bother with it now. I'm retired.

And as I said, I'll be retiring from my job at church last Sunday in April.

Q: So this is your last year there. Wow.

Queen: One family is quite upset. And I tell them, don't get upset. I'll still be coming to church. And I said I'll be working with you. But I said I don't want to go up there anymore. People don't understand. You would. When you're working with something and you know what's supposed to be, and you know you cannot go nowhere near what you want it to be, it's time to hang up. You know. And if you aren't giving anything to take the place of. Like I lost two basses at a time. And both of them read music. You lose something like that.

And then I lost an alto who reads music. My sopranos, I don't have a reader in that section. But sopranos, you see, melody is easy.

Q: You showed me a little bit, in the other room you have, on the wall you have some recognition from President Clinton.

Queen: Yes. It was just, at the fiftieth celebration, class awards from the president, governor, council members, Howard University, my church, the mayor. City Council people. He just sent me their congratulations.

Q: This is for the fiftieth anniversary of Howard?

Queen: And then I would just get them all. I have some in there that came from my twenty-fifth, fortieth anniversary at the church award. Certificates. I told them don't send me anymore because I don't have any room to put them on the wall.

But as I said when I first spoke to you, I'm very lucky in my life and in my field of music because there are very few people who can say what I can say. There is nothing that I wanted to do in music in my life that I haven't done. And very few people can say that. They say I wish. I can't say that. I always wanted to have something written, played by an orchestra, always wanted to have a choir sing with a symphony orchestra.

And one thing I didn't tell you about. I had written music that is published and that is used in all music in Methodist churches. It's in a book called Songs of Zion. I helped put that book together in Pennsylvania, along with some other well known black musicians. And we put that book together, and I have three compositions in that book that we use now in Methodist church on Sunday. Songs of Zion is what it's called.

Q: Well, I think maybe we can wrap it up unless there's anything else you want to add?

Queen: No I just thought of that. I didn't want to leave that out.

Q: Okay. Well this has been fantastic. Thank you so much.

END OF INTERVIEW