

# The 'horn' gets her due in PBS special

By Mary Campbell  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — "Anybody who is not madly in love with Lena Horne should report to his undertaker immediately and turn himself in."

Actor Ossie Davis makes that proclamation during "Lena Horne: In Her Own Voice," which launched the 11th season of PBS' "American Masters."

Horne, whose remarkable beauty radiated through a career in nightclubs, cabarets, movies and Broadway, turns 80 next June. Not that you can tell. Her smile is still dazzling, and her face wrinkle-free.

"My face has stayed, but my sight is gone," she says matter-of-factly during an interview. "I can't see very well." She also mentions having a pacemaker for "one of those strange heart problems."

Horne wears dark glasses and a turban that covers her hair, which she calls the color of cigarette ash at the bottom of a cup.

"And it's not neat-looking," she says. "When I get excited or upset, hairpins fly all over. I have to laugh — it's like the villain in the King Arthur cartoon."

During the PBS show, Horne says she got her start in show business because of her looks, not talent, and learned about music from working musicians.

She expands on that to a reporter, citing early help coming from Kay Thompson, who coached her in MGM musicals.

"She taught me how to open up and let the music out," Horne recalls. "I had a little voice and couldn't carry a tune. I was afraid to sing."

In the movie biography of Jerome Kern, "Till the Clouds Roll By," Horne sang "Why Was I Born?" one of Julie's songs in "Show Boat."

Kern asked for Horne for the 1946 Broadway revival of "Show Boat" but MGM, where she was under contract, didn't let her do it.

She felt that MGM was punishing her for turning down "St. Louis Woman," a Broadway show the studio had money in. When "Show Boat" became a movie, Kern had no say in casting. Julie, a mulatto, was played by Ava Gardner.

"It didn't harm my friendship with her," Horne says of Gardner. "It just gave me a little more realism about Hollywood."

One mentor, says Horne, was Paul Robeson, who her Brooklyn grandmother helped get a scholarship to Rutgers.

"She died when I was 15," Horne says. "Talking to somebody who knew my grandparents was thrilling to me. It was so interesting to me to learn part of my history from him. He talked about other black people who had survived. I had that to buoy me up."

Horne says she was frustrated and angry through much of her career, because of the way black people were treated.

"Partly, my vocal strength came from my anger," she explains. "I worked so many places black people couldn't be, so I couldn't enjoy the career."

"I was as prejudiced as my audiences were, for a long time. It didn't help my singing. I had to feel dominant. They were captive."

She finally began to love her career in her autobiographical show, "Lena Horne: the Lady and Her Music," which opened in 1981 and toured after a year on Broadway.

"I expressed anger, and audiences could understand it. The show got funny. I saw all the bad humor and also I felt I had survived and I was able to laugh about it," she says.

Near the end of the PBS show, Horne sings "Yesterday When I Was Young" with telling intensity.

"It's the most intense song I sing," she says. "It's very difficult for me, that song. It brings back too much."

"Every line has to do with my life. It talks about Paris and lovers I didn't have and maybe should have. And the way you don't fit in and you really suf-



LENA HORNE

fer on account of it. That's all in that song to me."

Though the show notes that Horne and her husband, Hollywood composer-arranger Lennie Hayton, separated in the 1960s, she says, "We were only separated for expediency, when I went south in Civil Rights days and he stayed home and did his writing. We never split up."

"He was very understanding. He's the only man I know who had no prejudices whatever."

He was thinking about writing, about music. I used to get furious with him because he didn't get angry the same way I was reacting."

Hayton, Horne's father and her son all died within a short span of time.

"I gave up," she says. "I thought I had nothing."

The person who brought her back to show business in the early 1970s was comedian Alan King, a cousin of Hayton's. They did shows

together, which included singing duets.

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**Aggie Pride:** The N.C. A&T State University Marching Band put on a spectacular half-time performance during the 100 Black Men Battle At The Border football game. The game capped off an exciting weekend of entertainment that featured a jazz concert, uptown parade and an old school house party.