



**STRIKING OPERA SINGER** — Kathleen Battle, the striking opera singer who is fast becoming known for her youthful, vibrant approach to classical music, is working to make her music more accessible to all theater-goers. Ms. Battle, a former music instructor who now sings regularly at the Metropolitan Opera in New York says there are an increasing number of blacks now entering the field.

## Georgia Educators Mark Paths By Blacks

ATHENS, Ga. (AP)—Dawn Bennett-Alexander feels she owes much of her success to the souls of black men and women who paved the way to create opportunities for future generations.

A former White House adviser on domestic policy, now an associate professor of legal studies at the University of Georgia, Ms. Bennett-Alexander says her strength comes from the struggle of her ancestors. For inspiration, she often looks to her office wall, where she has hung a photo of a black woman in traditional slave clothing.

The picture, called "The Boss," was taken by Prentice Polk, a black photographer of the Harlem Renaissance. According to Ms. Bennett-Alexander, his work went virtually unnoticed until the last few years of his life.

She discovered the artistry of Polk around 1980 while looking through Life magazine.

"The pictures were incredible," she said. "I thought what a shame his work was wasted. Especially when it creates this kind of feeling."

Ms. Bennett-Alexander said the woman in "The Boss" has more dignity and more common sense than many people whose wealth or academic degrees indicate their stature.

"When I saw it, I just started crying," she said. "The picture invoked something in me and touched me. This woman is all our grandmothers and mothers and aunts. She is connected to all of us."

Ms. Bennett-Alexander began tracing her own roots a few years ago. She said one of her influences was Athens author Ray Andrews and the family stories in his "Muskogean County Trilogy."

"I did it because of my girls," she said. "I didn't want anything to be lost. The past makes us who we are."

She was able to trace back to her great-great-grandmother, and was amazed with the information she found, mostly through old stories that were told to her by friends of the family.

"It's incredible what other people know about your family," she said. "I was surprised at the stories people told. It gave three dimensions to people I had never seen before."

Ms. Bennett-Alexander learned her great-grandmother, a slave, had a long scar on the side of her face. She had been scarred as she tried to defend herself against rape by the landowner.

"She tried to fight him off, but he did end up raping her," Ms. Bennett-Alexander said. "But she had the guts to stand up to the white landowner and say, 'You're not going to take me.'"

"That is real to me. It gives me a perspective that helps me do what I do."

Ms. Bennett-Alexander said that perspective and her rich family history not only influence her work, but her home life as well. "I love to garden," she said. "When I'm out there in the dirt, it's not just a matter of creating beauty. I think about our ancestors, about what a luxury it is for me to work at my leisure, and how it wasn't a choice for them to work in the fields from sunup to sundown. That gives me strength."

"I quilt. I feel very connected to my ancestors who I know toiled to provide physical comfort for their families with whatever they could... I'm a blue-ribbon bread maker. The rolling pin I use was my mother's. I feel a connection in everything I do."

Her daughters are the focal point of her life. She has made it a point to bring the past not only to the present for them, but to preserve it for their future as well.

"I was really conscious of that after my mother died," she said. "I have recipe books for each of my daughters and stories that go along with them. It makes me feel that if I died today, they would still have a part of me."

"It's been real important to talk to my daughters about being strong black women. They're going to be faced with so much. It's important for them to have a sense of who they are."

Ms. Bennett-Alexander has to smile when she tells of four-year-old Tess struggling to carry a gallon of milk to the kitchen table and accomplishing the feat.

"She said, 'Mama, I'm a strong black woman,'" said Ms. Bennett-Alexander. "So I know it's in there somewhere. It will always be there."

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