

BIOGRAPHIES

Eric Crawford is Director of the Charles W. Joyner Institute for Gullah and African Diaspora Studies at Coastal Carolina University. He holds a Ph.D. in musicology from The Catholic University of America. His research focuses on the rich tradition of Gullah music, specifically the retentions and alterations that have occurred since the antebellum period. Beginning in 2007, he conducted extensive field recordings on Saint Helena Island, site of the historic Port Royal Experiment, and his transcriptions are held at the Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. An outgrowth of this work was the Saint Helena Island Gullah Spirituals Project, which was a collaborative effort among scholars and students to preserve and foster the study of the earliest recorded Negro spirituals. In 2013, the Atheneum Press at Coastal Carolina University published his field interviews in a CD and accompanying booklet entitled *Gullah: The Voice of an Island*. His work on historic Sandy Island led to the 2017 publication *At Low Tide: The Voices of Sandy Island*. This booklet and interactive multi-media project highlight the rich history of Sandy Island and the need to ensure this island's continued survival. As part of this effort, a Civil Rights Grant from the National Park Service was awarded to Coastal Carolina University to rebuild the island's historic school and create an interactive cultural center. In 2018, Crawford was instrumental in receiving a National Archives Grant that will centralize South Carolina's Gullah Geechee research at Coastal Carolina University. Most recently he will appear in Henry Louis Gates' upcoming miniseries "The Black Church" and is music consultant for the new Amazon miniseries "The Underground Railroad."

Gregory Gardner earned a Bachelor and Master of Music degree in vocal performance from Howard University. He completed summer study at the Maurice Ravel Academy in St. Jean-de-Luz, France and the Summer Vocal Institute in Graz, Austria. He has been a soloist with the New York Pops, the Virginia Symphony, and the Virginia Opera. He has performed nationally and internationally in opera, oratorio, musical theater, and song recitals. In 2007, he relocated from New York to Norfolk, Virginia, his hometown, and joined the music faculty at Norfolk State University where he is an assistant professor of voice and coordinator of the Division of Music, teaching and mentoring many undergraduate and graduate students.

Dr. Lori Celeste Hicks; singer, composer, vocal coach, professor, and arts administrator; serves as the Chair of Humanities and Performing Arts at her Alma Mater, Kentucky State University. Dr. Hicks has moved audiences with her warm voice, magnetic personality, spiritual arrangements and soulful compositions. Her training, research, and passion have allowed Dr. Hicks to embark upon numerous projects in the areas of Black Music and African American Repertoire. As the creator of the "5S Vocal Method" Dr. Hicks has presented numerous workshops and masterclasses on healthy singing techniques and exercises to singers and speakers of all ages, vocal styles, and skill sets, particularly in Gospel and Musical Theater. Her lecture workshop, "From The Black Church To The Opera Stage: Transforming Students from the Gospel Belt to The Classical Sound" presented at the 2018 National Association Of Teachers of Singing (NATS) National Conference. Her recital series, "Music of My Voice: A Portrayal of the African American Experience through Classical Music: In Stage, Song, and Spirit" is a multimedia presentation of songs and arias by black composers which continues to be performed at universities and churches all over.

Her debut CD, "Music Of My Voice" released in 2014, is a collection of spirituals and songs all composed, arranged, and performed by Dr. Hicks. 2011 marked a pivotal year for Dr. Hicks,

becoming the youngest composer commissioned by the Negro Spiritual Scholarship Foundation (NSSF), and making her much-anticipated Carnegie Hall debut, singing Robert Ray's Gospel Mass. Since, she has returned to the Carnegie Hall stage with the professional voices of the EXIGENCE ensemble and the SPHINX organization. Dr. Hicks has performed title roles with several opera companies such as Arbor Opera, La Musica Lirica, Asheville Opera, and Opera Theater of Pittsburgh where she debuted as Bess in Gershwin's Porgy and Bess in 2009. A native of Detroit, Michigan, Dr. Hicks holds a Bachelor of Music Education from Kentucky State University, a Master of Music from Bowling Green State University, and a Doctor of Musical Arts from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

Dr. Bianca Jackson, coloratura soprano, is an Assistant Professor of Music at Norfolk State University. Bianca possesses over twenty years' experience in classical, sacred, and contemporary genres and has performed across the U.S. and in Italy. Last season, she was a soprano with the Virginia Opera Chorus. Bianca has performed with the Norfolk State University Theatre Company as featured soloist in Black Nativity and a Tribute to Whitney and Aretha. Her debut recital in Hampton Roads was with the Chesapeake Civic Chorus, under the direction of Geraldine Boone. She has been featured soloist on several recordings with the Tougaloo College Concert Choir and Jazz Ensemble. Honors include a Mississippi Arts Commission Fellowship, first place in the North Louisiana NATS graduate division, first place in the Texoma NATSAA South Texas district auditions, encouragement award for the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and finalist in New York City's Career Bridges Competition. Bianca presented and performed at the National Opera Association's Southeastern Regional Conference on selected operas of William Grant Still. Bianca earned a Doctor of Musical Arts in Vocal Performance from The University of Texas at Austin, with certification in African and African American Studies. Other degrees include a Master of Music in Vocal Performance from the University of Louisiana at Monroe and Music Performance and Music Education degrees from Tougaloo College.

Tommy L. Watson, Jr, baritone, serves on the music faculty at the South Carolina School of the Arts at Anderson University as Associate Professor of Music (Voice), and is the Founder and Director of Opera Workshop. Watson has a varied background as voice teacher, singer, vocal coach, and music director; and teaches internationally. An active member of NATS, Dr. Watson's students have been first place winners on the national, regional, and state levels. He has taught myriad classes such as: Opera Workshop, Opera Coaching, Applied Lessons, Vocal Pedagogy, Class Voice, Song Literature, Vocal Diction, Music Appreciation, Aesthetics, and Introduction to Gospel and Contemporary Worship Music, among other classes, including graduate music classes.