

Written by Patricia Turnier
Monday, 23 January 2012 16:59

Canara Price has been involved in the artistic field for decades. She is an award winning actress, director, dancer, singer (alto/mezzo) and producer. In 2007, she worked with Disney in theatrical productions. To be more specific, she was the Creative Safety Manager for Disney Theatrical Productions. She was a member of the opening production teams for Mary Poppins with Tony Award winners in Lighting and Set design, High School Musical National Tour, Mary Poppins National Tour and The Little Mermaid (musical). Price also opened an onsite production of the critically acclaimed 12-year running sensation, The Lion King, in Las Vegas, NV.

□ Canara Price was involved in six national tours for Broadway. She has produced several projects for the World Famous Apollo Theater featuring celebrities such as Clifford L. Alexander, Jr., Counsel to President Lyndon B. Johnson, Amy Sewell, filmmaker, Keith Brown, Senior Vice President of BET Network, and Civil Rights Activist, Esther Cooper. She was also involved in the success of the 2010 Apollo Spring Benefit, assisting Host, Jamie Foxx and other celebrities such as Danny Glover, Angela Bassett, Chris Tucker, and Leslie Uggams.

In addition to her success in the entertainment industry, Canara Price has a strong academic background. She studied in Engineering and holds a Master's in Industrial Hygiene with expertise in toxicology. Her mother was a teacher, so education was highly valued in Price's household. Canara Price is also known as an entertainment signer in the New York and Florida [Deaf](#) communities. On March 18 2011 the "PERFECT DAY" video first aired on MTV featuring the multi-talented actress, Canara Price, as the signer. Mrs. Price also taught rap artists Jim Jones and LOGIC the sign language that was used in the video.

On April 9th, 2011, Artist Direct released Jim Jones Premieres "Perfect Day" with a behind the scenes video on ARTISTdirect.com, showcasing [sign language](#). With recent appearances on 106 & PARK, the number 1 show on BET, Mrs. Price performs and signs for Jim Jones. He explained that he desires to give back to the community by making his music accessible to the deaf.

In addition, Mrs. Price was recently featured as the voice of the lead actress in a deaf feature film, "If You Could Hear My Own Tune", written and directed by award winning independent filmmaker, Ann Marie "Jade" Bryan of New York. Mrs. Price learned sign language while directing at People's Theatre Inc. (that she founded in 1999), a multicultural arts program in Orlando, where events are made accessible to the deaf. A non-profit arts organization, the theater company is strong on outreach with a stated mission to help youth from under non-profit privileged communities gain exposure to arts. As the executive director of this theater, Price has created and/or directed over 40 productions with her company, including regional tours. Several of her projects include partnerships with Miami Vice's Phillip Michael Thomas and the renowned R&B and Jazz recording artist, Miles Jaye.

To conclude, Mrs. Price is a versatile artist who brings originality to the musical scene and who

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is able to adapt to different settings. She is known as an entertainment signer in the New York and Florida Deaf communities. She became the first "signer" in a hip hop music video for artist Jim Jones (rapper). She has worked with numerous Broadway theatre artists, choreographers and set designers. She was also the assistant technical director in the Broadway production, "Come Fly Away" (directed and choreographed by world renowned, Twyla Tharp). Among the several honors received by Mrs. Canara Price, are the Lillie Stoates Award, 2003 Jefferson Awards for Public Service, 2005 Shining Star Award, 2006 ONYX Awards, and the 2007 Lioness Award for outstanding achievements in performing and media arts. [Since this interview, Mrs. Price is working on three shows for The Apollo Theater. Specifically, she is producing an Apollo education series consisting of 2 panel discussions, one focused on Behind the scenes: Music on Stage & Screen (January 23rd 2012) and the other on Women on Broadway (March 16 2012). She is also coordinating the audition process for Apollo's Amateur Night on Feb. 16th 2012 which will focus on tunes from Broadway/Off Broadway]. Mega Diversities had the pleasure to speak to Mrs. Price last summer.

PATRICIA TURNIER TALKS TO CANARA PRICE:

P.T. When did you master sign language and what made you interested in learning and developing this type of communication?

C.P. I have been studying sign language for seven years. I consider that you can never really master it because it is a language of people and every time you meet someone different, you learn something new about this type of communication and the culture. I embrace this art and I have evolved over the years by learning as much as I can. In Florida, I started a multicultural theater company. I befriended a woman with a deaf son who used to come to the theater. I have two deaf godsons. The theater was an artistic medium which made them feel free to ask me questions about life. I believe that when you are working with kids, you need to be able to give them as much information as possible. You have to provide them with tools which will allow them to make the right choices in life. So, it became important for me to learn sign language; this gave me the possibility to relate to my godsons by communicating with them effectively. As a performer involved in different realms such as acting, I think it is an asset to know another form of communication. It is an advantage to learn diverse types of expression. This is how I became involved in all this and I continue to develop myself as much as I can.

P.T. There are different sign languages. Which one did you learn?

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C.P. I learned the American sign language. Most countries have their own sign language but there is also the international one, which I learned some of; however, my focus is American and English sign language.

P.T. Deaf people love music and enjoy dancing like everybody else; however, these facts are ignored by some people. What are the biggest misconceptions about this among the general public?

C.P. I think the biggest misconception is living in a hearing world where we identify music with our ears (in other words with the sounds). So, some people think that music does not exist for deaf people. Nothing could be further from the truth. The reality is that music is much more than that. There are the visual rhythms and the beats that we feel. Deaf people can sing and they are visual people who enjoy the rhythm. They really do love music. So, the biggest myth is that music doesn't exist for deaf people. They can feel and see music.

P.T. Your collaboration as a sign language specialist with rapper Jim Jones became a first in hip hop history by making this genre accessible to the Deaf community. Can you elaborate on that and the impact it had on the deaf people?

C.P. It was a lot of fun. You are right, it was the first time that something like this was done in rap music.

P.T. If I am not mistaken it is not only with rap but with other commercial music such as pop that it was never done.

C.P. Yes, this is totally true.

P.T. So, let's hope you created a trend!

C.P. [Laughs] Jim Jones as an artist is always looking to create life, to explore other venues,

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so he was totally open to collaborate with me as a signer. In fact, it was Jim Jones' idea to incorporate sign language to rap because he wanted to make his music accessible to the deaf community. I hope that other artists in the music industry will be interested to make their work accessible to deaf people. I would love if the doors could be opened to deaf artists - musicians, DJs, rappers, etc. We have a lot of talented deaf music professionals who are out there and we do not know anything about them. This situation has to change. Jim Jones gave a taste of sign language to the mainstream in the music industry which allows the general population to realize that there are many things to discover.

P.T. How did Jim Jones come up with the idea to incorporate sign language in his work?

C.P. He has a close friend who has a deaf mother. She asked Jim Jones why he never did something with his music for the deaf audience. She told him that deaf people love music too. So, this is how the idea came to fruition. It began with a personal relationship that he had with someone who is deaf. This incorporation became very successful and Jim Jones got a lot of positive feedback from the deaf community which was very proud to see someone outside of their culture using their language to express their music.

P.T. How was your experience working with rapper Jim Jones?

C.P. Jim Jones attributes his creative vision of adding sign language to the Perfect Day video as a tribute to people with hearing disabilities. The song portrays what it would be like to live in a world with no violence or pressures, but just to relax, have fun, and enjoy the day. That would be a "Perfect Day". It was my first experience working with an artist from the rap and R&B music industry. Jim Jones is an incredibly gifted artist. He is also a great business man. I was pleased to see these two different aspects of his professional career. Our working relationship was good. It was easy to get along with him. He was very flexible and everything flowed. When I got involved as a signer, I didn't have time to familiarize myself with his songs. I found out about the shooting on the same day. Jim Jones was very helpful and generous because there are English words which do not necessarily translate well in sign language. I also worked with the managers and producers to make sure that I grasped the right meaning for the translation. Basically, Jim Jones trusted me to feel his music and his lyrics. He gave me the freedom to interpret his songs as a signer. In addition, he was interested to learn as much as possible about sign language. He even learned how to make the chorus of his song with the signs. Overall, I really appreciated the opportunity to work with him.

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P.T. In rap, there is often a slang vocabulary. Was it challenging to interpret this with sign language?

C.P. The sign language has its own culture with its slang and street language. But it is definitely not a one word to word translation. It was challenging but fun. In general, it came out great with the limited time that we had.

P.T. Can you share with us one of the most touching comments you received from a hearing impaired person regarding your work with music videos?

C.P. I would say a deaf friend of mine contacted me and said thank you. I responded thank you for what. He said thank you for giving access to the deaf world. I took that very personally and I was really moved; I felt humbled. I see myself simply as a vehicle. I appreciate being a part of that. It is fulfilling. It is Jim Jones' music with its creativity. I was a tool to transmit and express his work.

P.T. You were the voice of the lead actress in the deaf feature film, If You Could Hear My Own Tune. How was your experience being part of this movie?

C.P. It was a great experience. Ann Marie Brian produced the movie and she is deaf, so the theme of the movie was not a new territory to her. I voiced for Sylvie McShall who is the lead actress of the movie. Her role is Somalia. It was an enriching experience on many levels. I felt blessed to be part of this project and excited that I could use my knowledge of sign language to help her bring her voice out. My work allowed me to make her come alive through sounds. The entire film was done with sign language and it has captions. The director wanted to add voice to broaden the market and it worked because the movie ended up in several festivals. It had screenings across the country. This experience was very challenging because it was the first major project I did with the deaf community in the film making industry. This project took ten years to come to fruition. In addition, it is the first movie produced and directed by a deaf African-American female with mainly deaf actors. I want to add that Mrs. Brian is very creative; she invented a music jacket which allows deaf people to feel the music with the vibrations.

P.T. Do you have future projects with other rappers or singers that you can share with us?

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C.P. I reached out to several artists who are interested in incorporating sign language in their music videos. It has to be made official first before I can give more details to the media. I am looking forward to doing more concerts with Jim Jones. There will be the 2011 NY City Deaf Expo where over 10, 000 deaf people attend annually. Jim Jones will perform there.

P.T. You wear many hats. Is there an area in the music industry that you haven't yet touched which interests you? If so, tell us why.

C.P. There are a lot of different areas which interest me that I haven't touched yet [Laughs]. I love to perform as an actress. It is my real passion that I place above everything else, even as a signer. I love to transmit emotions and messages to the audience and receive energy. If God opens the door to me to a part of the industry, I will definitely walk through. I hope to have other projects with Broadway. I have been involved in production teams with musicals on Broadway and I am willing to embrace their future projects. I would like to pursue a musical theater role on Broadway.

P.T. You are the founder/director of a non-profit arts organization called Peoples Theatre, Inc. Tell us about its mission.

C.P. It is a Multicultural theater which was founded in 1999. The mission is to celebrate the diversity in the community by providing community services through Quality Theater. We bring a multicultural approach which reflect the artistic and social needs of today. We want to provide community growth while building bridges. We established a children motivational program. The theater provides a non-threatening learning environment in a relax climate. People open their minds and learn about the urban community, the deaf community and so on. We create culture shows for the audiences. I like to use this medium to educate. We use different art forms from elsewhere, like Africa. I believe theater is life (which is portrayed on stage) and our activities can provide tools to the members to go forward in life.

P.T. What message do you have for people who wish to follow in your footsteps as a signer in the music industry?

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C.P. Keep your mind open to absorb as much as you can because the more you know the more you are able to create and share with the audience. In terms of education, I have a background in Engineering. My mother pushed me to obtain a degree. When I was younger, I didn't like that, but with time I realized that it gives me options and people notice that. I am convinced that my versatility was instrumental in being involved in Broadway projects. I didn't have to struggle to find that position on Broadway. They asked me to move to NY; it was a great experience. I have a Master's degree which gives me tools to have a more analytical assessment with a broad vision. It is an asset in many realms.

Being involved in Disney theatrical productions also allowed me to use my artistic and engineering background. Everything that we do in life comes back together and falls into place. In other words, I believe everything we learn can be helpful and you can find a way to apply your knowledge.

Overall, I see life as an adventure where you have to step outside the box while you possess the energy and to take advantage of the opportunity whatever the realm. I believe that with hard work the doors will open. For instance, if someone doesn't have money to enroll in a drama school, s/he can find a theater to volunteer. This will allow her/him to get experience. There is always a way to work on your destiny. So, always keep moving forward. For those who are interested in becoming signers they can look for specialized schools in their state which provide the required courses while making contacts in the entertainment business. To conclude, I am going to leave the readers with a quote from Oprah: "Surround yourself only with people who are going to lift you higher."

P.T. Thanks Mrs. Price, it was a real pleasure to interview you! Keep up your original work!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMmITG6FUD0>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbQJcJx_D58

Filmography and Musicography

2011 Jim Jones Rap Video, "Perfect Day"
Signer (feature) Melillo Production - NY

2011 If You Could Hear My Own Tune
Voice for Somalia (voice)

2003 Billie (short)

1997 Night Orchid
Store Clerk

Additional work:

The Center Ellie ItFitz Productions - NY

Little Boy Blue Mrs. Walker Milton Walker - NY

Urban Adventures of Dodger Rourke Luna Michael Beddome - NY

Sunset Gloria Chinisha Scott Films -NY

Broken Harmonies Mom Reel Studio Production - NY

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Elect The Truth Vanessa NYU Student Film - NY

Orphans of Orwell Vanessa Thomas Carrera – SVA - NY

Florida Classic Reporter (feature) Walt Disney World Entertainment

Industrial Training Film Nurse Aid Shands Hospital - FL

Selected Theatre (Regional) work:

Homecoming Leslie (lead) Eugene Ashe - NY

Dunmore Bad and Good Michelle Obama Cindy Pierre/Milagro Theatre - NY

Chastity of Hearts Ruth Spellbound Conservatory - NY

Rewriting Her Life April Barbara Sutton Masry - NY

Selected Guest Artist work:

A Raisin in the Sun Beneatha Loch Haven Art Museum-Orlando

TV

“Ask The Team” Commercial Feature FOX, Channel 13 - Tampa

“Bay News 9” Commercial Feature Bright House - South Florida

Training

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Acting Coach - Chris Jorie (New York/Florida), Tony Major (Florida)

Voice – Eric Michael Gillette (New York), Erich Rausch (New York)

Dance – Belly, Jazz, Ballet, Tap – The West Side Dance Project (New York)

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

- Producing • Production Management • Non-profit services
- Directing • Theatrical Safety • Event Planning
- Public Speaking/Acting • Leadership Consulting • Fundraising / Budgets/ Grants

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

* David Benken – Tech Dir. Assistant to the Tech. Director Jan 2010 – Mar, Sept 2010
New York, NY Assist Tech. Director with daily admin/production duties for the Load In and Out of Come Fly Away

* Apollo Theater Foundation Producer/Production Mgr Nov 2009 – present
New York, NY Produced (and still is) a series of panel discussions and educational programs on careers in production entertainment. Provide stage management and support services for Annual Apollo Spring Benefit.

* Disney Theatrical Productions Broadway Theatrical Prod/Safety Mgr. Aug 2006 – Sep 2009
New York, NY Partner with Broadway creative teams to ensure the director's vision of multimillion dollar productions is executed in an artistic yet safe environment. Broadway: Mary Poppins, The Lion King, The Little Mermaid, The Lion King Las Vegas.
National Tours - High School Musical, The Lion King, Mary Poppins.

* Walt Disney Company Senior Manager April 1997 – July 2006
Orlando, FL Job Hazard Analysis; Consulting; Program and Physical Monitoring; OSHA Compliance; Training

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* People's Theatre Executive Director June 1999 – Sept 2008

Orlando, FL Production/Operation management, Public relations, budgeting, supervised admin staff and contract artists. Produced 28 shows directed 14.

Produced/Directed in 2005-2006:

Prod/Dir.: Martin Luther King & Malcolm X Tour

Prod: Two Trains Running by August Wilson

Prod/Dir.: Spike Lee's School Daze (original)

Prod/Dir.: The Wiz (YPT)

2004-2005 Prod/Dir.: Fall Festival: The Thrill of Stomp (YPT) (original)

EXPERIENCE CON'T.

Prod/Dir.: Martin Luther King & Malcolm X Tour

Prod: Purlie Victorious by Ossie Davis

Prod/Dir.: Spunk: Three Tales of Zora adapted by George C. Wolfe

PAST SELECTED WORK:□□□□□

2003-2004 Prod: School Daze Reading (original)

2002-2003:

Prod: Fences by August Wilson

Prod: Ma Rainey's Black Bottom by August Wilson

Prod: The Wiz (YPT) by Charlie Smalls

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2001-2002:

Prod: Purlie Victorious by Ossie Davis

Prod: The Old Settler by John Redwood

2000-2001 Prod: Deaf Comedy Jams (Deaf Actors showcase)

Prod: The Amen Corner by James Baldwin

Prod: Martin Luther King & Malcolm X by Jeff Stetson

1999-2000:

Prod/Dir.: Spunk: Three Tales of Zora adapted by George C. Wolfe

Prod: A Raisin In The Sun by Lorraine Hansberry

EDUCATION

* Central Missouri State University, Master of Science, Industrial Hygiene – Emphasis: Toxicology

* Grand Valley State University, Bachelor of Science, Health Science

ORGANIZATION AFFILIATIONS

* Screen Actor's Guild (SAG) Eligible

* National Association of Black Journalists

* Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

* National Association of Black Interpreters, Inc.

* National Black Deaf Advocates, Inc.

AWARDS/RECOGNITION

- * Walt Disney World's Community Service Award for the Arts – 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006
- * The Jefferson Award for Public Service - 2003
- * President's Volunteer Service Award - 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006
- * American Red Cross's Shining Star Recipient - 2005
- * Outstanding Arts Impact Recipient - 2006
- * ONYX Performing Arts Award - 2006
- * The Links Lioness Award –Community Service - 2007