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Marion Cumbo

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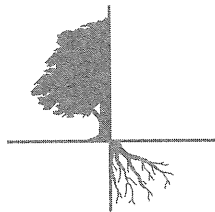
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them with sweets. As the children became involved with his church, so, too, did their parents.

In August 1902 the mission moved to a house on 124th Street. Despite hostile neighbors and a February 1904 fire, the Salem church flourished, and it was promoted to independent status in 1908. The congregation then relocated to a property at Lenox Avenue and 133d Street, where it resided until 1924. Later Salem took possession of a West Harlem edifice formerly occupied by predominantly white Calvary Methodist Episcopal Church. During the early 1920s Salem Methodist Episcopal Church counted over twenty-five hundred names on its rolls (with a youth group of over two hundred members) and was solidly established as one of Harlem's largest and most influential institutions.

During a vacation in 1906 or 1907, Cullen was introduced to Carolyn Belle Mitchell, a soprano and pianist based in Baltimore. After a short engagement they were married at Salem, and she assisted him with his duties there until her death in 1932. The Cullens were childless until they unofficially adopted a teenager named Countée Porter sometime prior to 1919. As COUNTÉE CULLEN, the boy became a prominent lyric poet and a star of the Harlem Renaissance.

Frederick Cullen enjoyed a close relationship with his son, who composed at least two poems in his honor ("Fruit of the Flower" and "Lines for My Father, Dad"); an enthusiastic traveler, the elder Cullen relished their annual joint visits to Europe and the Middle East between 1926 and 1939. Their family became ranked among Harlem's cultural elite, and Countée Cullen's 1928 wedding (to Yolande Du Bois, daughter of W. E. B. DU BOIS) was a social extravaganza with a guest list of twelve hundred.

At the height of his career, Frederick Cullen was regarded as a major force in the black community. His ministries paired evangelistic fervor with initiatives for social justice and extracurricular programs for Harlem children. By the time of Cullen's retirement, the church offered more than three dozen activities and clubs for young people; the most prominent of these was the Salem Crescent Athletic Club, whose alumni included champion boxer SUGAR RAY ROBINSON. The church also raised tuition funds for a number of its youths, sending them to schools such as Atlanta's Gammon Theological Seminary, which awarded Cullen an honorary doctorate. In addition, Cullen battled crime through strategies such as visiting brothels incognito, subsequently badgering their proprietors with the observations he had collected in order to pressure them toward more seemly business practices. Cullen also supported the development of the National Urban League, a merger of three smaller social service agencies into a single, substantially more effective organization.

Cullen also provided counsel to the founders of churches such as Epworth Methodist Episcopal, and his church hosted the "World Gospel Feast" parties led by the charismatic and controversial George W. Becton. A fierce believer in interdenominational

cooperation, Cullen worked closely with other powerful religious leaders such as ADAM CLAYTON POWELL SR. (head of Abyssinian Baptist) and Hutchens C. Bishop (rector of St. Philip's Protestant Episcopal) during his tenure as president of the Harlem branch of the NAACP, this branch having been established in 1910. Under his watch, the chapter grew to more than one thousand members; its accomplishments included successfully petitioning the New York City government to appoint its first African American policeman, Samuel J. Battle (later New York's first African American sergeant, lieutenant, and parole commissioner) in 1911. With other NAACP leaders, he organized protest demonstrations and raised legal aid funds for cases such as that of the SCOTTSBORO BOYS. Cullen led his church for four decades, until ill health forced him to step down. According to his autobiography, he retired on 14 April 1942, but other records cite 1943 or 1944 as the year in question. Cullen outlived both his wife and son, dying at home in New York City at the age of seventy-eight.

Further Reading

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PEG DUTHIE

CUMBO, Marion (1 Mar. 1899–17 Sept. 1990), cellist, was born in New York City. Cumbo was inspired to pursue music by the careers of the great cellist Pablo Casals and the violinist and black musical comedy composer WILL MARION COOK. He was educated in the city's public schools as well as at the Martin-Smith School of Music, where he became a protégé of Minnie Brown, and at the Institute of Musical Art (later the Juilliard School of Music), where he studied with Willem Willeke. He also studied with Leonard Jeter and Bruno Steindl in Chicago, Illinois. In 1920 Cumbo received special recognition as a featured soloist at the annual convention of the National Association of Negro Musicians in New York.

During the 1920s Cumbo became a part of the Negro String Quartet, with Felix Weir as first violinist, Arthur Boyd as second violinist, HALL JOHNSON as violist, and Cumbo as cellist. They originally played informally in homes two or three times a week, rehearsing Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven quartets. Later they performed concerts in New York, Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia, where they appeared with singer MARIAN ANDERSON. The quartet also

accompanied singer ROLAND HAYES in a Carnegie Hall recital rendering of Negro spirituals arranged by Johnson. Cumbo expressed the desire to show that blacks could be identified with high art instead of high crime as usually portrayed in the media.

Cumbo worked in both concert and theatrical venues. He was a soloist with the Philadelphia Concert Orchestra, a black symphonic group founded in 1905 with Gilbert Anderson as its conductor. In the late 1940s he performed with the African American musical director EVERETT ASTOR LEE's Cosmopolitan Little Symphony, and in the 1970s he played with the Senior Musicians' Orchestra of AFM Local 802. During the interims he performed in the pit orchestras for the *Midnight Frolics* revue at the Amsterdam Theatre (1919) and in the 1922–1924 touring company of NOBLE SISSLE and EUBIE BLAKE's Broadway musical *Shuffle Along*.

Other Broadway productions in which he performed were the *Chocolate Dandies* of 1924, *Brown Buddies* of 1930, *Blackbirds* of 1938, and *Hot Mikado* of 1939. He also played in various vaudeville shows and appeared with both the Johnson and the EVA ALBERTA JESSYE choral ensembles.

Cumbo came of age as a "New Negro" striving for equal access to the symphonic stage. To address this dilemma he became a part of a racially inclusive ensemble known as the Symphony of the New World (1964–1978). Lee led his nearly half-black orchestra into performances of the European works of Brahms, Mendelssohn, and Saint-Saëns, as well as the African American works of WILLIAM GRANT STILL, Howard Swanson, and ULYSSES SIMPSON KAY. To provide more performing opportunities for black symphonic players, Cumbo and his impresario wife, Clarissa Burton Cumbo, established Triad Presentations in 1970, which presented annual concerts at Alice Tully Hall. Cumbo represented a pioneering artist who bridged the concert and theatrical worlds while enhancing the performing status and opportunities for blacks in America.

MARVA GRIFFIN CARTER

CUMMINGS, Blondell (22 Oct. 1949–), dancer, choreographer, artistic director, educator, and activist, was born in Effingham, South Carolina, the eldest of three daughters of Jack Cummings and Carrie Cummings, sharecroppers who grew tobacco and cotton. When Blondell was a year old, the Cummingses, like many African American families of the mid-twentieth century, migrated to the North. While both her parents had relatives who previously moved to New York, it was Jack who followed two of his four church-singing brothers to the city to pursue careers in the commercial music industry. Upon the family's arrival in Harlem, Jack found work as a taxi driver, and Carrie earned a living as a domestic and later completed school to become a health-care professional. Cummings described her upbringing as very strict and typical of most black families. Her mother was the disciplinarian, and while her father was not

an authoritarian, together they ran a stable household with the support of family and friends who lived in the neighborhood. She had plenty of cousins and extended family from South Carolina who lived in Harlem and were there to reinforce her strong connection to the black community.

It was during her childhood that Cummings developed an appreciation for music and dance. Coming from a family of aunts, uncles, and cousins who were singers, and being a part of a junior high school choir and orchestra, she was connected to music from an early age. Dance was an integral aspect of her upbringing as well. During a time when jazz, the Lindy hop and jitterbug, and the Savoy and Renaissance ballrooms were popular, dance was everywhere in Harlem. Cummings's parents and neighbors danced socially, and she participated in African dance classes at the local community center. Programs offered by the Police Athletic League introduced her to modern dance and further cultivated her interest in the art.

Cummings's father wanted her to become a lawyer, and her mother saw a future for her in teaching, but Cummings was convinced that a career in the arts, particularly dance, was her calling. Nevertheless, she felt a responsibility to pursue higher education. She attended New York University's School of Education and later matriculated at Lehman College for graduate work, where she studied film and photography. While pursuing her studies, Cummings found ways to integrate art with academics. She studied dance at the Martha Graham, José Limón, and Alvin Ailey schools. Her training was eclectic. Among the African American dance legends she studied with were Walter Knicks of the KATHERINE DUNHAM Dance Company, PEARL PRIMUS, Mary Hinkson, ALVIN AILEY, Rod Rodgers, TALLEY BEATTY, and Eleo Pomare. Her extensive training in modern dance was developed through her education directly with Martha Graham, Alwin Nikolais in the Martha Graham technique, Merce Cunningham, Erick Hawkins, and the Lester Horton technique.

Beginning in the 1970s Cummings redefined modern dance by placing her identity and cultural experiences at the center of what would be considered a European American modern dance style. She became a renegade, going against the restraints of both traditional African American and European American concert dance. Her choreography was categorized variously as modern dance, experimental dance, and performance art. She was known for blending dance, theater, dialogue, storytelling, "freeze-frame" gesture, mime, photography, video, and personal reflections to create unique performance pieces that fall into the genre of postmodern dance. Influenced by the music of Philip Glass and Steve Wright, Cummings was drawn to the postmodern aesthetic because of its combination of both traditional and nontraditional approaches to art.

The universal dynamics of relationships, emotions, community, and family influenced her work, and she approached choreography from a personal, social,