

A scene from the opera "Carmen," which was performed this season by Opera Ebony. Cast members and chorus come from all over the country.

In Philadelphia:=

Opera Ebony is Grand Opera

The trio on the small stage at the side of City Hall in Philadelphia gave an excellent rendition of the mini-opera "Impressarie" by Mozart. The singing and acting were superb and the abundant laughter that accompanies a good comedy performance continually rang through the clear spring air.

When the performance was concluded, the audience was lavish in its praise of the three—two female and one male—performers. They had brought a bit of Old World culture to the inner city. They had performed an opera for an audience that probably would never attend a performance on their own initiative.

Not only was the audience in attendance at the lively performance unique, the performers themselves were a rare sight in this country.

Reginald Pindell, Cynthia Wormley and Helen Lamb are black opera performers. They work for Opera Ebony, an all-black opera company formed in November 1974 to fill a "serious gap" in the opera world.

When you talk about grand opera and opera houses, Opera Ebony is out there all alone. Based in Philadelphia, the opera company now has a staff of 200 and affords talented singers a showcase.

By Lester Phillips

Malcolm Poindexter, a television newscaster and talk show host who serves as Opera

Ebony's business manager, says there has always been an abundance of black singers who



Two of the principals in the Opera Ebony production of "Carmen," Veronica Tyler and George Shirley.

were willing and qualified to perform the major operas.

But, he says the public seldom got a change to see these singers because major opera companies say they "don't want to offend their audiences by having a black play the lead."

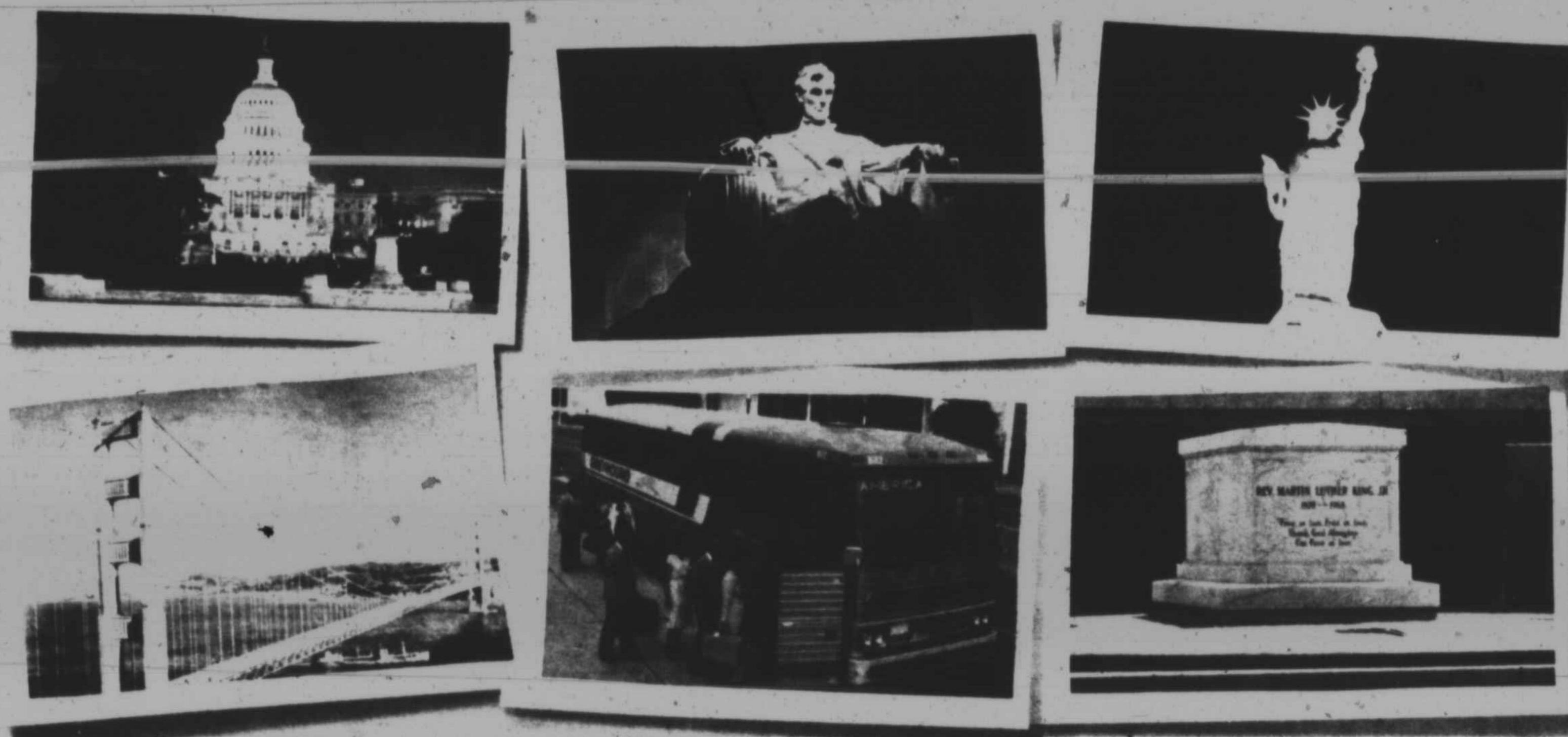
"It is particularly hard for male singers," Poindexter said. "The male lead in an opera is often a romantic part and the major opera companies would hate to cast a black male in such a role with a white woman."

Tiring of this mindset and desiring to alleviate the situation, Benjamin Matthews, a New York opera singer; Wayne Sanders, a pianist; Broadway producer and conductor Margaret Harris and Sister Mary Elise S.B.S., decided to form the Opera Ebony company.

Poindexter explained that Opera Ebony is the only black opera organization of its type in the world. "There are some black student (college) opera companies. But when you talk about grand opera and opera houses,

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