

**TSIANINA
REDFEATHER
BLACKSTONE
1882-1985**



**NATIVE
AMERICAN
MUSICAL
TRAILBLAZER**

The Indianist movement of the 1920s incorporated American Indian music with some of the basic principles of Western music, with the goal of creating a new, truly American national music. Tsianina Redfeather was an important part of this movement.

Florence Tsianina Evans was Creek/Cherokee singer who was born in 1882 in Eufaula. When she was sixteen and attending the Eufaula Indian Boarding School, a matron recognized her piano talent and sent her to Denver to study music. Recognizing her singing talent, her teacher recommended Tsianina to John Wilcox, Denver's leading voice teacher. Three weeks after her first lesson with Wilcox, he introduced her to Charles Wakefield Cadman, a Caucasian composer and pianist, who was touring the country giving lectures about Native American music.

From 1909 to 1916, Cadman and "Princess" Tsianina Redfeather toured the United States and Europe, giving recitals to large audiences. Wearing a beaded headband and buckskin dress, she sang Cadman songs while he accompanied her on the piano. His composition "From the Land of the Sky-Blue Water" soon became her signature song.

During World War I, Tsianina, who had two brothers in service, organized an entertainment troupe of Southwest Indian men and toured allied camps in France and Germany. For her service, General John J. "Blackjack" Pershing honored her with a commendation as one of the first women to volunteer to entertain the troops.

Tsianina helped Cadman create the opera "Shanewis", loosely based on her autobiographical stories. It premiered in March 1918 at the Metropolitan Opera with Sophie Braslau in the title role, who was coached by Tsianina. It was the first American opera with a contemporary American setting staged at the Met. Highly popular, it toured the United States. Tsianina sang the lead at some performances, making her opera debut in Denver in 1924.

In 1920, she married David Balz of Denver but the marriage was probably brief since she did not mention him in later years. Tsianina's greatest success came in 1926 when she performed *Shanewis* at the Hollywood Bowl. Around 1930 she married Arthur Blackstone and moved to Chicago, where she was a frequent artist on WLS Radio. This marriage only lasted three years.

In 1935, Tsianina retired from singing. She worked as an activist on Indian education and served on many panels examining the plight of Native Americans. She co-founded the American Indian Education Foundation. She also served for thirty years on the Board of Managers for the School of American Research, intended to promote archeological and ethnological research related to Native Americans. A devout Christian Scientist later in life, she lived with her niece in Burbank, California in the 1960s and 1970s and later in San Diego in the 1980s.

Tsianina died in 1985 at the age of 102. At the height of her career, Tsianina, a mezzo-soprano virtuoso, had performed in the capitals of Europe, the Metropolitan Opera House, and with most of the major symphony orchestras in the United States.